

Whose Kliuev, Who is Kliuev? Polemics of Identity and Poetry

MICHAEL MAKIN

THE poet Nikolai Kliuev (1884–1937) has fascinated and provoked to polemics successive generations of Russian readers, attracting to this day treatments that range from the hagiographical to the denunciatory. In his own lifetime he elicited strikingly diverse reactions from those who came into contact with him or who read him. In many cases, those reactions, both hostile and favourable, sprang not only from contrasting perceptions of the poet's own individual identity, but also and especially from opposite conceptions of the cultural identity of Russia itself, with reference to which the poet himself self-consciously constructed aspects of his poetics and his literary image. When Kliuev 'returned' in full to the libraries and book stores of Russia in the 1980s and 1990s, he and his works once again became an arena of violent dispute in which opposing camps fighting to claim the national cultural heritage and its meaning disputed ownership of Kliuev as part of a large, even grandiose agenda of cultural ideology. The stories of him and his work thus provide eloquent testimony to the fault lines discernible in national culture during and even after the twentieth century, and the reiteration of disputes across several generations provides vivid evidence both of continuity and, on closer inspection, also of change and dislocation in the ways in which Russia and its culture are imagined. The persistence into the present of mythological constructions of Kliuev's life and persona, at least some of them now patently contradicted by widely available evidence, testifies also to a very strong desire among many commentators on Russian culture to demonstrate the existence in the recent, but materially remote, past of the country of an authentic and

Michael Makin is Associate Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan.

This article is a considerably revised and expanded version of a paper originally presented at the conference 'Negotiating Cultural Upheavals: Icons, Myths, and other Institutions of Cultural Memory in Modern Russia, 1900–2000', Ohio State University, 13–15 April 2000. Research for it has been supported by an IREX short-term grant, and by funding from the University of Michigan. The author thanks the numerous Kliuev scholars who have assisted him in his research, in particular Sergei Subbotin, Aleksandr Mikhailov, Elena Markova and Liudmila Kisileva. He is also and especially grateful to the Director of the Vytegra kraevedcheskii muzei, Tamara Makarova, for her frequent help, to the former Headmaster of the Koshtugi village school, Fedor Kostitsyn, and to Tat'iana Kostitsyna and other teachers in that school, for their assistance in his research on the village.

unique combination of elements constituting a kind of authentic, popular, Russian national spirituality. The hostility with which that position is opposed by others indicates the degree to which the discussion engages powerful ideological concepts, while the fact of the discussion itself illustrates the continued intensity with which Russian poets and Russian poetry are read and rated in public discourse about culture.

Kliuev was a 'new-peasant poet' (indeed, he was a 'new-peasant poet' before the term was coined), who came from a relatively remote part of rural northern Russia but, although certainly a 'peasant' in terms of the broad social and legal definitions of late-imperial Russia, he probably had little or no direct experience of subsistence agriculture while growing up, and his main direct contact with village life after the late 1910s was during several summers spent on vacation in the Viatka region.¹ Nonetheless, his associations both with the north and with the land were essential features of his self-presentation and of the claims, explicit and implicit, made in his works. Kliuev was born near the southern end of Lake Onega, almost certainly in the village of Koshtugi (in present-day Vytegra region, Vologda oblast).² In the same area (although in a different village, where his father was the landlord of a wine store) he also spent most of his childhood and youth, and then lived in the nearby small town of Vytegra for several years after the Bolshevik Revolution. So it is not surprising that the Russian north figures prominently in his verse, and equally prominently in the identity he projected as a mature author; yet the specific characteristics of the north are often subordinated in Kliuev's work to an expansive and universalist agenda, sometimes with an expressly 'orientalist' slant (Bombay and Tibet are, he claims, explicit in the vernacular culture of

¹ By far the fullest account of Kliuev's life is to be found in K. M. Azadovskii, *Žizn' Nikolaia Kliueva: dokumental'noe povestvovanie*, St Petersburg, 2002 (hereafter, *Žizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*), a revised and expanded version of the author's *Nikolai Kliuev: put' poeta*, Leningrad, 1990. As will be suggested in these pages, Azadovskii's Kliuev is, however, at times somewhat different from the figure portrayed by other scholars. The term 'new-peasant poet' (*novokrest'ianskii poet*) was coined by Vasilii L'vov-Rogachevskii in his book *Poeziia novoi Rossii*, Moscow, 1919. It is generally used to designate the turn-of-the-century generation of village-born poets, including Kliuev, Esenin, Shiriaevets and Klychkov.

² Most scholars have accepted the details of Kliuev's birth first provided by A. K. Gruntov, 'Materialy k biografii N. A. Kliueva', *Russkaia literatura*, 1, 1973, pp. 118–19, but the Petrozavodsk author Vasilii Firsov has continued to dispute them: 'Suzhdeniia i fakty (O rannei biografii Nikolaia Kliueva)', *Sever*, 5–6, 1996, pp. 147–54; "'Byt' v trave zelenym, a na kamne serym . . .'" (*Zametki o zhizni i tvorchestve Nikolaia Kliueva*), *Sever*, 11, 2000, pp. 149–50. The absence of complete clarity on the circumstances of the future poet's birth is illustrative of key cultural paradigms in the study of the poet, among them: the disappearance of so much of the fabric of village life, as inhabited by Kliuev's contemporaries; the problems of documenting the lives of ordinary Russians born even one hundred years ago; and the signal complexities of interpretation posed by Kliuev's own construction of identity, as explored in these pages.

Trans-Onega).³ Moreover, within his statements of purely northern identity, his own *petit pays* is notable largely for its absence, although his poetry abounds in northern toponyms that might be designated culturally richer.⁴ The especial novelty of this new-peasant poet's verse, moreover, lay not only in his deployment of images and language drawing on the popular culture and language of the north, and on the everyday life of the peasantry, but also in a self-conscious cult of the (high-cultural and learned) archaic — Old Russian culture, the literature and history of the Old Belief, and similar relatively abstruse areas of reference are as common as details of village life. Furthermore, in comparison with the other 'new-peasant poets' (especially with Klychkov, Shiriaevets and Oreshin), Kliuev's poetry is linguistically much more challenging, formally more complex, and thematically much more diverse.

Kliuev's works frequently assert his special status through birth and thus privileged knowledge of the *narod* (people, folk) as an authorized spokesman for popular Russian culture and its bearers: 'Ya posviashchennyi ot naroda' ('I bear the people's consecration') begins a famous lyric of 1918.⁵ Yet, in the 1910s Kliuev, this son of the soil, was a prominent member of literary St Petersburg, familiar with and at one time close to the Guild of Poets and other institutions of elite culture; from 1923 to 1934 he lived in Petrograd/Leningrad and Moscow (apparently returning only once and briefly to his native area). While in the two capitals he often inveighed against urban culture and the influences of Western industrial civilization. Memoirists frequently depict his speech, his dress and the furnishing of his rooms as expressly archaic in design and detail (facts confirmed by photographs), although many of those memoirists, as is characteristic for attitudes to the poet in general, are either hostile investigators of fraud or charmed witnesses of authenticity.⁶

³ Among Kliuev's many programmatic statements about the inherent cultural proximity of both peasant Russia and the Russian north to the East is the lyric 'Vylez tulup iz chulana', in Nikolai Kliuev, *Serdtshe edinoroga: stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (hereafter, *Serdtshe edinoroga*), intr. A. I. Mikhailov, ed. V. P. Garnin, St Petersburg, 1999, pp. 310–11. Here the modest sheepskin coat announces its association to Tatar khans, Kashmir and Tibet, and the River Nile. The poem concludes 'Kto neskazannoe chaet, / Veria v tulupnuu mglu, / Tot naiavu obretaet / Indiiu v krasnom uglu'.

⁴ See Liudmila Iatskevich, 'Poeticheskaia geografiia Nikolaia Kliueva', *Vytegra: kraevedcheskii al'manakh*, vypusk 2, Vologda, 2000, pp. 154–94. Kliuev's allusions in verse to his home area are limited indeed: Vytegra is the 'Glukhoman' severnogo brevenchatogo gorodishka', although unnamed in the final version of the poem (*Serdtshe edinoroga*, pp. 422–23, 912), and 'Krasnyi orel' begins 'Glukhaia Vytegra ne slyshit uragana' (*ibid.*, p. 415; emphasis added). The hurricane of the first line represents the dramatic events of the early Soviet years).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 391–92; compare the early 'Goloz iz naroda' (pp. 125–26) among many others.

⁶ The memoir of Georgii Ivanov, discussed in the following pages, is the classic account of the 'invented' Kliuev, but there are many other, more hostile accounts of the poet's fraudulent image-making, including, for example, Igor' Bakhterev, 'Kogda my byli

It is another paradigm and paradox that Kliuev was an early and enthusiastic apologist for the new Bolshevik state, but soon became a severe critic, then a target of that state's overt hostility, and eventually its victim. Equally striking is the fact that parts of the literary record of his criticism — late poems long thought lost, but published during the glasnost' period — turned out to have been preserved in the archives of the very body which repeatedly arrested and condemned him, before finally executing him (Kliuev, as was made clear only in the 1980s, was arrested in Moscow in 1934, interrogated, and exiled to Siberia, then arrested twice more, the second Siberian arrest precipitating his execution in October 1937).⁷ Finally, at least for the purposes of this enumeration, Kliuev, the 'new-peasant poet' and cultural archaist, was a homosexual who, moreover, wrote some of his most striking love lyrics in the late 1920s and early 1930s (that is, early in the Stalinist period), and whose homosexuality contributed to his martyrdom on an equal footing with his verse.⁸

Given the paradoxes and polarities listed above, it is no surprise to find that his poetry is thematically and formally diverse, sometimes programmatic, to some often rebarbative, to others first and foremost a product of Russian modernism, but to many of the poet's most

⁶ *Continued*

molodymi (Nevydumannyi rasskaz)', in E. Zabolotskaia and A. Makedonov (eds), *Vospominaniia o Zabolotskom*, Moscow, 1977, pp. 81–82, and Erik Gollerbach, *Vstrechi i vpechatleniia*, St Petersburg, 1998, pp. 298–99. Both Bakhterev and Gollerbach comment on the decoration of Kliuev's Leningrad apartment. Perhaps the most enthralled memoirist is Nadezhda Khristoforova-Sadomova, whose 'Vospominaniia o poete Kliueve Nikolae Alekseeviche' were published by Aleksandr Mikhailov in his 'Ot poezii "izbianogo kosmosa" k pis'mam iz Sibiri (Pis'ma Nikolaia Kliueva k N. F. Khristoforovoi-Sadomovoi iz Tomska)', *Nash sovremennik*, 5, 1992, pp. 153–56 (hereafter, 'Vospominaniia o poete Kliueve Nikolae Alekseeviche'). Many memoirs of Kliuev have been collected in *Nikolai Kliuev glazami sovremennikov*, ed. V. P. Garnin, introduction by A. I. Mikhailov, St Petersburg, 2005. This volume provides the full range of reactions to Kliuev, but is by no means complete — surprising omissions include Georgii Ivanov's most famous treatment of the poet; Gollerbach's hostile remarks are also absent.

⁷ Lev Pichurin, *Poslednie dni Nikolaia Kliueva*, Tomsk, 1995, charts Kliuev's Siberian exile, final arrests, and execution. Vitalii Shentalinskii published extracts from the transcript of the poet's 1934 interrogation, and also most of the verse appended to that 1934 file: Nikolai Kliuev, 'Gamaiun — pitsa veshchaia', ed. V. Shentalinskii, *Ogonek*, 43, 1989, pp. 9–12; see also the English version of Shentalinskii's book on his discoveries in the KGB archive, Vitalii Shentalinsky, *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Voices of the Soviet Regime*, trans. John Crowfoot, New York, 1993, pp. 197–209; Kliuev's *magnum opus*, *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi*, the greatest of Shentalinskii's finds, was first published in *Znania*, 11, 1991, pp. 4–44 (corrected text, *Serdtshe edinoroga*, pp. 701–816).

⁸ Among the love lyrics is the cycle 'O chem shumiat sedye kedry' (*Serdtshe edinoroga*, pp. 551–70). Confirmation that Kliuev was arrested and convicted on *two* counts may be found, for example, in the official communication between the Tomsk and Novosibirsk branches of the NKVD of 4 July 1936, published among 'Dokumental'nye materialy', *Nikolai Kliuev: obraz mira i sud'by: materialy Vserossiiskoi konferentsii 'Nikolai Kliuev: natsional'nyi obraz mira i sud'ba naslediiu'*, ed. A. Kazarkin, Tomsk, 2000, p. 211. There is rather coy discussion of this issue in Azadovskii, *Zhizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*, p. 286.

enthusiastic readers a unique statement of the potential, hidden power of popular Russian culture.

Nature and the life of the peasantry feature prominently in Kliuev's verse, especially his early lyrics, but often in abstract or even programmatic combinations. In 'Ja molilsia by liku zakatu' (I would pray to the dawn's icon face, 1912), the lyrical speaker aspires to pray to the dawn, explicitly identified with an object of Orthodox veneration by the word *lik* (face of a saint depicted on an icon), but is constrained by his status as a prisoner — a characteristic combination for the early Kliuev of implied social protest and spiritual yearning:

Я молился бы лику заката,	I would pray to the dawn's icon face,
Темной роще, туману, ручьям,	To the dark grove, the mist, the streams,
Да тяжелая дверь каземата	But the prison's heavy door
Не пускает к родимым полям —	Will not release me to the fields I love —
Наглядеться на бора опушку,	To lose myself staring at the woodland's edge,
Листопадом, смолой подышать,	To breathe in the leaf fall, the sap,
Постучаться в лесную избушку.	To knock at the forest hut,
Где за пряжею старится мать ... ⁹	Where at her yarn my mother ages ...

Later the poetic presentation of the peasant world is very expressly mythologized, quite undeniably 'literary' and even at times abstract, but usually without any notes of social protest. The fifteen-poem cycle 'Izbianye pesni' (Songs of the peasant hut, 1914–18) gives one of the most sustained and effective statements of this mythology, expressed, for example, in the sacral act of bread baking, the results of which are described in the thirteenth poem of the cycle:

Коврига свежа и духмяна,	The round rye loaf is fresh and fragrant
Как росная пожня в лесу,	Like a dew-covered woodland meadow,
Пушист у кормилицы мякиш	Fluffy is the life-giver's inside
И бел, как бересто, испод.	And white, like birch bark, the base.
Она — избяное светило,	The loaf is a peasant-hut constellation,
Лучистее детских кудрей,	Shining brighter than children's curls,
В чулан загляни ненароком —	Glance into the larder unthinkingly
В лицо тебе солнцем пахнёт. ¹⁰	And the smell of the sun will strike you.

Associated with Kliuev's descriptions of the life and culture of the countryside are his many poems which explore or elaborate popular religious forms. Often the references are to the Old Belief, but equally common in his verse are motifs from Russian sectarianism. Many

⁹ Kliuev, *Serdtsie edinoroga*, pp. 172–73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

poems appear to emulate the forms of sectarian songs — for example, the ‘Radel’nye pesni’ (Songs of ecstasy, 1912), the first of which begins:

Ах вы, други — любовные собратья,	O friends, brothers amicable,
Обряжайтесь в одежду — в цветно платье.	Dress up yourselves, put on bright clothes.
Снаряжайтесь, умывайтесь беленько, Расцветайтесь, как зорюшка, аленько,	Prepare, wash yourselves white, Shine bright red like a lovely dawn,
Укрепитея, собратья, хлебом-солью,	Strengthen yourselves, brothers, with victuals,
Причаститея незримой Агничей кровью! ¹¹	Partake of the unseen Lamb’s communion blood!

As in so many of Kliuev’s works associated with popular religion, the popular model — in this case the rather remote model of sectarian songs — is recalled by folkloric and similar forms (*drugii, odezha, tsvetno plat’e, belen’ko, alen’ko*), yet undercut both by very literary elements (‘Prichastites’ nezrimoi Agnichei krov’iu’) and, most obviously, by apparently self-consciously homoerotic overtones. Among many other examples of such paradoxical combinations in his works drawing on popular religious motifs, the poems relating to the *skoptsy* (castrati) stand out. ‘O skopchestvo — venets, zolotoglavyi grad’ (O sect of castrates — crown, gold-roofed city, 1916–18) is a particularly striking example, not least because, after three stanzas of ecstatic and very rhetorically elevated praise for the sect, the poem concludes with a single, typographically separate line: ‘Pust’ kritiki menya nevezhdoi nazovut’ (Now let the critics call me ignorant).¹² That line, as well as foregrounding the programmatic nature of this cultural statement, illustrates another common feature of his verse — the radical dislocation, thematic or stylistic, of the putative coherence of the lyric. In other examples, it is the opening line, not the conclusion, that may seem inconsistent with the rest of the poem. Some poems make very programmatic statements in bold opening lines, only for the rest of the lyric to take a somewhat different direction. Examples include ‘Muzhitskii lapot’ sviat, sviat, sviat!’ (Holy, holy, holy is the peasant shoe, 1914), where the opening line is an apparently blasphemous appropriation of Isaiah 6:3, and ‘Olenii gusak sladkozvuchnee Glinki’ (Deer liver is sweeter-sounding than Glinka, 1916–18).¹³ Those striking openings are not entirely predictive of the poems as a whole, and the polemical tone is not sustained.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 177.

¹² Ibid., p. 333.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 226, 318–20.

However, there are yet other examples where a programmatic tone is sustained throughout the poem, especially in such works of the Soviet period as ‘Kto za chto, a ia za dvoperst’e’ (Men may support what they wish, but I am for making the sign of the cross with two fingers, 1928), ‘Nasha russkaia pravda zagibla’ (Our Russian law/truth has perished, 1928), ‘Mne revoliutsiia ne mat’ —’ (The revolution is not mother to me, 1932).¹⁴ That last work is also characteristic of the many poems exploring and elaborating the poet-speaker’s own cultural identity — often in contrast to others; ‘Menia Rasputinym nazvali’ (They called me Rasputin, 1917) is an earlier example, while the two-poem cycle addressed to the ‘proletarian’ poet Vladimir Kirillov of 1918–19 is exemplary not only of Kliuev’s literary polemics, but also of his frequently foregrounded onomastic play:

Твое прозвище — русский город, Азбучно славянский святой, Почему же мозольный молот	Your sobriquet is a Russian town, An alphabetically Slavic Saint, Why then should the callous hammer
Откликается в песне простой? [. . .]	Echo in a simple song? [. . .]
Убегай же, Кириллов, в Кириллов, К Кириллу — азбучному святому, Подслушать малиненок переливы, Припасть к неоплаканному, родному. ¹⁵	Run off, then, Kirillov to Kirillov, To Kirill — the alphabet Saint, To listen to the trills of robins, To fall before the unlamented, the native.

The elaborate and cacophonous play on the addressee’s name is, of course, a polemical reminder that the proletarian poet bears not only the name of an ancient Russian town (and site of a major monastery) but also a derivative of the name of one of the Apostles to the Slavs, St Cyril the Philosopher, after whom the Cyrillic alphabet is named. Yet the apparent simplicity of this polemic is itself undercut by the insistent punning: in fact, Vladimir Kirillov, whose ‘sobriquet is a Russian town’, bears the names of *two ancient Russian towns* (little Kirillov and Vladimir the Great), while the speaker’s advice that his fellow poet flee towards what appears to be a rhetorical summation of what he ought to be — ‘Run off, then, Kirillov to Kirillov, / To Kirill — the alphabet Saint’ — is rendered problematic by the fact that he would most certainly not find St Cyril the Philosopher (the ‘alphabet Saint’ of the ninth century) in the town of Kirillov. That town and its monastery bear instead the name of the monastery’s founder — St Cyril of White Lake (1337–1427).

In another of Kliuev’s treatments of Russian hagiography, ‘Nila Sorskogo glas: “Zemnorodynne brat’ia”’ (The voice of St Nilus of Sora:

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 541–42, 543–44, 577–78.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 353, 398–99.

'Earth-born brothers', 1918/19), the fifteenth-century trans-Volga ascetic is heard to expound what are evidently the views of the twentieth-century author Nikolai Kliuev.¹⁶ The Saint, in another combination, characteristic of Kliuev, appears both to inveigh against the neo-apocalyptic destruction of Russia and to predict the emergence, nonetheless, of a universalist, messianic Russian idea from the culture of the Russian north:

Нила Сорского глас: «Земнородные братья, Не рубите кринов златоствольных,	The voice of Neil Sorsky: 'Earthborn brothers, Do not cut the crowns of the gold-trunked trees,
Что цветут, как слезы в древних платьях, В нищей песне, в свечечках юдольных. Низвергайте царства и престолы, Вес неправый, меру и чеканку,	That flower, like tears in ancient dresses, In an impoverished song, in mournful candles. Overturn kingdoms and thrones, Unfair weights, measure, and coinage,
Не голите лишь у Иверской подолы, Просфору не чтите за баранку.	Just don't bare the skirt tails of the Iberian Virgin, Don't treat communion bread as ring rolls.
[. . .] Не к лицу железо Ярославлю, —	[. . .] Iron does not suit the face of Iaroslavl',
В нем кровинка Спасова — церквушка: Заслужила ль песью злую травлю На сучке круживчатом, пичужка?	It has the Saviour's blood — a church: Has the bird upon the lace branch Deserved evil, dog-like persecution?
[. . .] Русь течет к Великой Пирамиде,	[. . .] Old Russia flows toward the Great Pyramid,
В Вавилон, в сады Семирамиды;	To Babylon, to the Gardens of Semiramis;
Есть в избе, в сверчковой панихиде	Within the peasant house, in its cricket requiem,
Стены Плача, Жертвенник Обиды.	Are the Wailing Wall, the Altar of Obida.
[. . .] Покумится Каргополь с Бомбеем, Пустозерск зардеет виноградно,	[. . .] Kargopol' shall befriend Bombay, Pustozersk shall gleam like grapes,

¹⁶ See Maikl Meikin [Michael Makin], 'Nikolai Kliuev i Nil Sorskii', *Dvadsat' pervyi vek na puti k Kliuevu: Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii 'Olonetskie stranitsy zhizni i tvorчества Nikolaia Kliueva i problemy etnopoetiki', posviashchennoi 120-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia velikogo russkogo poeta Nikolaia Kliueva 21–25 sentiabria 2004 g.*, ed. E. Markova, Petrozavodsk, 2006 (hereafter, *Dvadsat' pervyi vek na puti k Kliuevu*), pp. 87–96.

И над злым похитчиком-Кашеем	And over the evil abductor Kashchei
Ворон-смерть прокаркает злорадно» ¹⁷	Raven death shall caw maliciously. ⁷

Notwithstanding the many works decrying the onset of Soviet modernity, Kliuev, like many contemporaries, also made attempts to reconcile himself with the new regime — he had, after all, initially greeted its arrival with great enthusiasm (as his cycle of poems to Lenin demonstrates, albeit somewhat eccentrically), only to begin to sound warning notes as he fell foul of it in the early 1920s.¹⁸ Among his most evident attempts at reconciliation are his ‘Novye pesni’ (New songs, 1926), one of which begins ‘Segodnia prazdnestvo u domen’ (‘Today the blast furnaces are celebrating’).¹⁹ Quite different, however, are the notes struck in most of his poetry of this period and later. Many works offer an apocalyptic vision of the country — perhaps most striking of all is the three-poem cycle ‘Razrukha’ (Destruction, 1934), confiscated by the secret police at the time of the Moscow arrest that precipitated his Siberian exile.²⁰ The first poem in the cycle charts a bleak route across the Russian north that actually follows approximately the path of the White Sea Canal, which the poem categorizes bluntly as *belomorskii smert’-kanal* (White Sea death-canal). The opening lines announce unambiguously the darkness of the vision:

От Лаче-озера до Выга	From Lake Lache to Vyg
Бродяжил я тропой опасной,	I wandered by a dangerous path,
В прогалах брезжил саван красный,	In glades there flashed a red shroud, red,
Кочевья леших и чертей.	The wanderings of forest spirits and devils.

Equally remarkable are Kliuev’s late, self-evidently homoerotic love poems which, it appears, he even attempted to publish.²¹ Works such as ‘Ty bormotal, chto liubish’ deda’ (‘You mumbled that you loved the old man’; the sixth poem in the twelve-poem cycle *O chem shumiat sedye kedry* [What the grey cedars sing of, 1930–32]) testify as strikingly as Kliuev’s apocalyptic and visionary verse to the poet’s pursuit of a unique and highly risky literary strategy.²²

¹⁷ Kliuev, *Serdtshe edinoroga*, pp. 408–09.

¹⁸ For the cycle *Lenin*, see *ibid.*, pp. 377–78, 399–408, 899–900.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 533.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 624–31, 764–65, 961.

²¹ On Kliuev’s attempt to publish his love lyrics, see Ivan Granskii, ‘O krest’ianskikh pisateliakh (Vystuplenie v TsGALI 30 sentiabria 1959 g.)’, ed. M. Niqueux, *Minushee: istoricheskii al’manakh*, 8, 1989, pp. 139–74.

²² Kliuev, *Serdtshe edinoroga*, p. 560.

In fact, the late Kliuev was not granted access to the printing press, but there is abundant evidence that he gave readings of his — often politically challenging — work, and especially of his later narrative poems. Among them, the most widely presented was probably the *poema Pogorel'shchina* (The burnt ruins, 1928). This work of nearly 900 lines charts the disintegration of the once idyllically pastoral northern village of Sigovyi Lob (Whitefish Forehead). The links between cult, culture, nature and the folk are emphasized in the opening sections of the poem. In the following passage, Old and New Testaments are characteristically blended, while the popular form *Onego* is preferred to the standard *Onega* for the name of the lake, as the narrator describes the handiwork of one of the village's artisans:

У Прони скатерть синей	Pronia's tablecloth is bluer than Onega
Онега, —	
По зыби едет луны телега,	Along its ripples runs the moon's cart,
Кит-рыба плещет и яро в нем	The whale-fish splashes and within it
Пророк Иона грозит крестом. ²³	The Prophet Jonah brandishes a cross.

Nature and religion (again, apparently a blend of Orthodoxy, Old Belief, and 'paganism') are intertwined in Pronia's craft, as in the work of the word carver Olekha and the icon-painter Pavel. But ill omens presage disaster for the village — the craftsmen die, the holy men abandon the area (indeed, as in other Kliuev poems, the saints abandon Russia altogether) and Sigovyi Lob is seized by a dragon. The village disintegrates as its people perish or are barbarized. Barbaric, too, is the (clearly Soviet) language in which requests for help are rejected by the representatives of modernity, who address the village's 'pine cherubim' as *grazhdane kheruwimy* (citizen Cherubim) and identify them as *eksponaty iz gubzdrava* (exhibits from the county health department). However, in a characteristic dislocation, the final parts of *Pogorel'shchina* turn away from the main narrative to tell the story of a mythological city while continuing to lament the fate of contemporary Russia.

Although it was widely known that Kliuev had worked on another long work after *Pogorel'shchina*, that work, *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi* (Song of the Great Mother), was thought to have been lost in the aftermath of

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 670–95 (p. 671). On Kliuev reading *Pogorel'shchina* see, inter alios, R. Menskii, 'N. A. Kliuev (1887–1937)', *Novyi zhurnal*, 32, 1953, pp. 132–33; Boris Filippov, 'Pogorel'shchina Nikolaia Kliueva', *Studi in onore di Ettore lo Gatto e Giovanni Maver*, Florence, 1962, pp. 236–37; Azadovskii, *Zhizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*, pp. 235–37. Among the famous to whom he read the poem was the artist Mikhail Nesterov (see Kliuev's letter of 18 December 1929 to Anatolii Iar-Kravchenko: Nikolai Kliuev, *Slovesnoe drevo*, ed. V. P. Garnin, St Petersburg, 2003 [hereafter, *Slovesnoe drevo*], p. 264). Kliuev hoped at one time that the work would be published, as that letter indicates; his letter of 18 May 1933 to the same addressee gives details of the non-publication (*ibid.*, p. 298).

his Moscow arrest of 1934. But during the glasnost' period an extensive draft (of nearly 4,000 lines) was found appended, like the cycle 'Razrukha', to the poet's file in the archive of the Moscow KGB. *Pesn'*, as published, is a remarkable work, blending a mythologized autobiography of the poet with a lament for modern Russia. The narrative voice is markedly inconsistent, at times even playful, while the range of references — from history, mythology and literature to contemporary events — is wide. Like the narrative and the thematics, the work's language and form are markedly unstable. The poem moves, sometimes vertiginously, between ludic and tragic moments, between lyric reflections and notably 'civic' impulses.

At many points the fate of Russia is the object of elevated rhetoric:

Тут ниспала полынная звезда —	Here fell the wormwood star —
Стали воды и воздуха желчью,	The water and air became bile,
Осмердили жизнь человечью.	And befouled the life of man.
Да и будет Русь безулыбной,	And Russia shall have no smile,
Стороной нептичной и нерыбной! ²⁴	A land without birds and without fish!

Yet this passage comes just two pages after the lyric exposition of romantic love — a nursery-tale-like account, apparently of the narrator's homosexual love affair:

Жил да был медвежий дед,	Once there lived an old bear-man,
Самый вещий самоед,	The most prophetic Samoyed,
С ним серебряный лосенок,	With him lived a golden elk-calf,
От черемухи ребенок. ²⁵	Child of the bird cherry tree.

Pesn' also includes historical digressions where, among others, Esenin, Rasputin and Russia's last Emperor are encountered. The draft breaks off with its primary narrative (of the family of a mythologized 'Nikolai Kliuev') unfinished and the laments of its narrator (evidently the historical Nikolai Kliuev) only partly elaborated.

As this brief survey suggests, Kliuev's poetry is diverse and paradoxical; many works are internally contradictory, some are linguistically or referentially challenging. However, attempting to summarize and categorize his oeuvre as a whole is riven with problems: folkloric stylizations, programmatic aesthetic statements, complex, genre-breaking narrative works, and integral lyric statements can be found side-by-side in any chronological presentation of his verse.

Similar observations may be made of his biography, and his presentation of self where, among many other intriguing and problematic combinations, aspects of the period's interest in 'life creation' encounter

²⁴ Kliuev, *Serdtshe edinoroga*, pp. 770–71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 768.

aspects of the period's preoccupation with the popular. Consequently, it is no surprise that in his lifetime he was admired by many of the prominent figures in Russian modernism, and deeply mistrusted by others. As a very young man he was an influential correspondent of Blok, when the latter was already an established poet (and before the two of them had actually met).²⁶ As a mature poet, he was praised by Mandel'shtam, among many others.²⁷ Yet, in 1908 Rozanov, noting Kliuev's impact on Blok, was dismissive of the young man, accusing him of what might be called 'cultural fraud', *although he, like Blok, had not even met Kliuev*.²⁸ Much later, Georgii Ivanov, when himself already in emigration, painted a famous ironic portrait of the Kliuev whom he had encountered in St Petersburg during the 1910s.²⁹ Ivanov depicts Kliuev, the latest figure to seize the attention of the capital, as a fraud — a self-conscious, *style russe* imitation of a peasant (Ivanov finds Kliuev dressed in collar and tie, reading Heine in the original, but the Olonian poet refuses to go out to dine with Ivanov until dressed in 'appropriate' — i.e., peasant — garb). The portrait is reproduced by Khodasevich, and imitated by many subsequent writers — although it might be added that Ivanov's original is framed by a positive evaluation of Kliuev the poet, largely ignored in subsequent versions.³⁰ These 1920s émigré versions of Kliuev the fraud acquired analogues with more

²⁶ Kliuev's extensive correspondence with Blok (whose replies are lost) was first published in full by Konstantin Azadovskii, 'Pis'ma N. A. Kliueva k Bloku', *Literaturnoe nasledstvo tom 92: Aleksandr Blok, novye materialy i issledovaniia*, 5 vols, Moscow, 1987, 4, pp. 427–523. The same editor published a revised and expanded edition of the letters in book form in 2003: Nikolai Kliuev, *Pis'ma k Aleksandru Bloku, 1907–1915*, Moscow, 2003 (hereafter, *Pis'ma k Aleksandru Bloku*).

²⁷ In his 'Pis'mo o russkoi poezii' of 1922, Mandel'shtam wrote of Kliuev (representing, alongside Kuzmin and Akhmatova, poetry after Symbolism), that 'Kliuev prishel ot velichavogo Olontsa, gde russkii byt i russkaia muzhitskaia rech' pokoiatsia v ellinskoi vazhnosti i prostote. Kliuev naroden, potomy chto v nem uzhivaetsia iambicheskii dukh Baratynskogo s veshchim napevom negramotnogo olonetskogo skazitelia' ('Kliuev came from stately Olonets, where the Russian way of life and Russian peasant speech are based in Hellenic significance and simplicity. Kliuev is of the people because within him live side-by-side the iambic spirit of Baratynskii and the prophetic tune of an illiterate Olonian singer of tales'): Osip Mandel'shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, ed. G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov, New York, 1969, vol. 3, p. 34.

²⁸ Rozanov described Kliuev as a "muzhichok" [...] vziat otkuda-to iz restorana, gde on imel dostatochno povodov zavidovat' kutiashchim "gospodam" ("little peasant" [...] taken from some restaurant where he had had ample opportunity to envy "gentlemen" out on the town'), quoted by Azadovskii from Rozanov's pseudonymous article, in *Pis'ma k Aleksandru Bloku*, p. 134, note 5. In the same commentary, Azadovskii cites similarly savage commentary on Blok's fascination with Kliuev from a 1907 article by D. Filosofov (pp. 134–35, note 6).

²⁹ Georgii Ivanov, 'Peterburgskie zimy', *Iz literaturnogo nasledstva: Stikhotvoreniia; Tretii Rim, roman; Peterburgskie zimy: menuary; Kitaiskie teni, literaturnye portrety*, ed. N. Bogomolov, Moscow, 1989, pp. 333–34.

³⁰ Vladislav Khodasevich, *Nekropol': vospominaniia*, Paris, 1976, pp. 186–92.

sinister overtones at home, where the early Soviet period saw the deepening and narrowing of the polemic around the poet. Kliuev became the object of increasingly hostile and threatening commentary from its organs and agents — beginning with the sophisticated but distinctly unsympathetic remarks of Trotskii, and ending with the brutal savagery of books and articles which all but called for his head.³¹ By the end of the 1920s his poetry was characterized as a fraudulent stylization of popular life (that is — in a paradigmatic move for the period — the earlier accusations of cultural fraud had now gained a direct ideological meaning with increasingly urgent political import). He was unambiguously identified as a kulak and almost completely isolated from the public institutions of literature.

Kliuev spent the last ten years of his life as what a later era would call an ‘underground author’, totally excluded from official culture; after his death his name was barely encountered in the Soviet Union for many years. In the West, a few scholars worked to preserve his memory and to cultivate the image of a poet-martyr.³² Cautiously and partially returned to his native land in the 1960s and 1970s, he was much more widely discussed in and after the last years of Soviet power, when a remarkable array of new works was discovered and published (including those from the archive on Lubyanka Square), adding to the considerable body of poetry first published abroad by Western editors in the 1950s and 1960s.

The pre-glasnost’ publications in the West had reached and interested a relatively limited circle of readers in Russia and had had little or no impact on the main lines of development of Russian literature — in marked distinction to the works of many of Kliuev’s contemporaries who had shared his fate of persecution, exclusion, exile and/or execution in the Soviet period. For those contemporaries, exclusion from the official literary discourse of the country, identification as an ideological enemy and subsequent ‘liquidation’ not only guaranteed a place in the voluminous martyrology of Russian culture, but also contributed to the enthusiasm of an underground readership at home in the later Soviet

³¹ On the impact of Trotskii’s commentary — which made its way from *Pravda* to the Petrozavodsk paper (with serious local consequences for the then Vytegra-based poet), and finally into chapter two of *Literatura i revoliutsiia* — see Azadovskii, *Zhizn’ Nikolaia Kliueva*, pp. 194–95. For the later stages of the campaign against Kliuev, see the entry on him in *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, ed. P. Lebedev-Polianskii, A. V. Lunacharskii, et al., 11 vols, Moscow, 1929–39, 5, pp. 324–25. It is exemplary in its savagery (and inaccuracy), identifying the poet as one of the most prominent practitioners of the kulak style in Russian letters.

³² Of especial importance were the Western publication of two collected works: Nikolai Kliuev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 2 vols, ed. B. Filippov, New York, 1954, and Nikolai Kliuev, *Sochineniia*, 2 vols, ed. G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov, Munich, 1969. The latter was particularly significant, since it included a large number of previously unknown late poems, discovered by the British Slavist Gordon McVay. Both editions included *Pogorel’ shchina*, which had been exported and preserved by the Italian Slavist Ettore lo Gatto.

decades. But Kliuev's posthumous literary fate was different: his poetry was, among other things, too difficult to read, too remote and too different from the challenging poetry that was being assimilated — albeit often unofficially — from other parts of late Russian modernism, after having been declared contraband in the Stalinist period (Tsvetaeva, Mandel'shtam, Khlebnikov, OBERIU, and so on). The reception of glasnost' period publications of Kliuev in Russia was similar — even the works from the archive of the KGB (which seems to have preserved relatively few works of literature, making the discovery of major works appended to Kliuev's file all the more sensational) received relatively little commentary, although they might be argued to speak with striking force both of the time of their composition and of the time of their publication.

Yet, notwithstanding Kliuev's limited readership, the last two decades have witnessed another fierce and bitter struggle for possession of the poet, his oeuvre and the meaning of his literary achievement. Thus, although Kliuev has been short of people willing to read him, he has certainly not been short of people to write about him, from scholars to journalists and prominent cultural ideologues. The polemics around him in late-Soviet and post-Soviet Russia have reiterated many of the initial cultural and ideological battles provoked by the poet and his work in the 1910s and again in the early Soviet period, although the new historical context has given them a quite different quality. That they continue to the present day also serves as a reminder of the persistence of highly ideologized and polarized readings of literature in Russia's new cultural environment. And such readings quite possibly contribute to the apparent indifference towards the poet shown by the majority of potential 'general readers' and less ideologically inclined writers.

Kliuev has often (and predictably) been discussed in terms of the abiding question of 'the people and the intelligentsia', with its multiple implications in the world of art — from aesthetics to the social meaning of artistic production. Blok, the author of a famous essay of that very title, accepted the young Kliuev as a legitimate representative of the people, quoted his correspondent's words as the voice of the people, and helped to legitimize Kliuev's verse as such (partly, of course, because Kliuev began his correspondence with Blok at precisely the point when the latter was most preoccupied with the issues that Kliuev's situation seemed to embody).³³ Indeed, Kliuev's claim to be 'of

³³ The role of Kliuev in shaping Blok's reflections on this topic, and Kliuev's shaping of himself to fit this topic are among the major themes of Azadovskii's introductory article, 'Stikhiia i kul'tura', in Nikolai Kliuev, *Pis'ma k Aleksandru Bloku*, pp. 5–108. Blok's essay, originally entitled 'Rossiia i intelligentsia', was read to the Religio-Philosophical Society in 1908.

the people' is by no means without substantiation. As has been seen, he came from a relatively remote part of the peasant north and he grew up in villages, not towns; some of his verse (although not his earliest poetry) is strongly marked by folklore, regional language, the preoccupations of the Russian village and its denizens, as well as by the popular beliefs which characterize the Russian peasantry. Even the abundant signs of learning in his later work are mostly characteristic of the eclectic autodidact — a popular phenomenon, after all. At the same time, Kliuev's roots in Russian modernism, and its critical influence on his development are equally evident, while the self-conscious, literary presentation of peasant forms also militates against any reading which sees him purely as an 'organic' product of popular culture. Moreover, Kliuev's earliest verse is derivative and literary — his move towards folklore and dialect may thus be read as a response to the interests and demands of later modernism. The wide range of his religious referents and models, and his abstract conceptualization of the peasant universe may also be read as predicated upon the interests and writings of the Russian intelligentsia around the turn of the century, rather than solely on any inherited culture.

Within the context of Russia's binary social divide, what renders the Kliuev polemic especially acute is another familiar binary — those polarities of 'authenticity' and 'fraud', already illustrated by the opposite reactions to the poet of Blok and Rozanov: the poet is an authentic, organic product of ancient tradition, and is therefore entitled to speak for the popular bearers of that tradition in a way no 'educated' person could; the poet is a fraud, manufacturing himself in accordance with the idealistic and even naive view of the 'people' held by some of the intelligentsia, in order to appeal to that very intelligentsia. The differences of opinion between Blok and Rozanov were reiterated and further complicated by others among Kliuev's earliest commentators. When the poet became allied with a group called the 'Golgotha Christians' in the early 1910s, the latter saw him as their popular prophet and seer, and promoted his *bratskie pesni* (fraternal songs — partly modelled on the folklore of Russian sects) as genuine expressions of the popular.³⁴ However, when their leader, the former priest Iona Brikhnichev, fell out with Kliuev, Brikhnichev began to declare that the poet had simply 'stolen' actual sectarian songs and published them as his own. As is evident, both positions are shot through with contradictions characteristic of these familiar binaries: Kliuev was eventually proved a fraud by the authenticity of his songs.³⁵

³⁴ Among key 'fraternal songs' are 'Brachnaia pesnia', 'Usladnyi stikh', and 'On pridet! On pridet! I sodrognutsia gory' (Kliuev, *Serdse edinoroga*, pp. 133–34, 154–56, 156–57).

³⁵ The dispute between Brikhnichev and Kliuev (its cause remains unclear) is described by Azadovskii in *Zhizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*, pp. 93–96. On Brikhnichev, see V. Bazanov, 'Trudnaia biografiia', *Zvezda*, 12, 1979, pp. 176–88.

Even in this early period, certain key elements which would be recurrent in Kliuev's own later autobiographical constructions (and would be recurrently disputed by others) are apparent too — for example, Brikhnichev, presumably relying on Kliuev's own words, describes in an article of 1912 the poet's spiritual apprenticeship on the Solovetskii islands.³⁶ This is a feature of many later autobiographical statements and of biographies by others, but it has yet to be supported by any documentary evidence.³⁷ It is especially important within the identity matrix, since it links Kliuev to the far north (rather than to his own native region); places him at a major site of Russian spirituality; and associates him by implication with the rebellious spirit of the place (as a centre of Schismatic thought, the Solovetskii monastery had resisted Muscovite power during the siege from 1668 to 1674). The Solovetskii motif is also characteristic in its social and confessional character — it has both 'high' and popular resonance, and it associates the poet simultaneously with the official church and with the Old Belief. It is curious that this first occurrence of the Solovetskii episode (in Brikhnichev's 1912 article) is apparently also linked to homosexuality — Brikhnichev implies that Kliuev, while on the Islands, was a victim of the inappropriate attentions of debauched monks. That association disappears subsequently, to be replaced by motifs of spiritual apprenticeship at the feet of pious elders. Although Kliuev's own, much later, autobiographical narratives often include overt or covert statements of homosexual identity, sometimes with religious associations and, in one case, a statement of homosexual initiation, these statements are most often tied to Russian sectarianism or to another confession (Islam in 'Gagar'ia sud'bina'), but never to the Old Belief. Thus, Kliuev, in his later autobiographical statements, employed the conventional association of sexual difference with religio-cultural 'otherness' to provide the context for statements of his own sexual identity. Since sectarianism was linked in the popular and literary imagination with sexual profligacy, while the Muslim East and, especially, the Muslim Caucasus were conventional sites for the imagined construction of alternative sexuality in Russian culture, Kliuev's positioning of his own homosexual initiation in these marginal areas has a clear cultural logic. Equally logical, in terms of the poet's programmatic statements of nationality, is the fact that, in later autobiographical works, core (rather than marginal) elements of projected national, popular identity — such as, in Kliuev's version, the Old Belief — are no longer associated with homosexuality.

³⁶ Iona Brikhnichev, 'Severnoe sianie (O Nikolae Alekseeviche Kliueve)', *Rul'*, 355, 18 June 1912.

³⁷ Konstantin Azadovskii has repeatedly disputed Kliuev's Solovki narratives, most recently in his 'Gagar'ia sud'bina' *Nikolaia Kliueva*, St Petersburg, 2004 (hereafter, 'Gagar'ia sud'bina' *Nikolaia Kliueva*), pp. 42–45.

In later autobiographical statements (some in prose, some in verse, and some made in accounts given to and recorded by others) Kliuev's claim to be associated with the Islands inevitably gains a different resonance since, of course, Soviet power made the Islands a part of its emergent prison archipelago. This last fact illustrates another characteristic of Kliuev's identity — that which was formed in the 1910s within the orbit of Russian modernism and the context of a cultural preoccupation with the Russian peasantry is sustained but given quite new meaning in the very different and more dangerous environment of Stalinism. This example illustrates, too, how Kliuev's constructed identities articulate complex relations not only to culture, history and self, but also to power — the Solovetskii Islands are explicitly and implicitly associated with forms of resistance. Thus, to continue to elaborate an autobiographical narrative based upon the Islands' association with Old Russian culture, with the Old Belief, and with popular resistance to central power after the Islands had become a Soviet prison camp, was one of the many provocative gestures made by Kliuev in the later 1920s and the 1930s (comparable as a provocation to the composition of homoerotic love lyrics and to the repeated description of contemporary Russia as a realized apocalypse).

When Kliuev returned to urban Russia, after spending the early Soviet years in Vytegra (settling in Petrograd in 1923, and moving from there to Moscow in 1931), he elaborated his autobiographical mythology with increasing detail and in a number of different contexts, several of them implicitly contradictory. The further he moved from northern Russia and its culture and the further his country moved from any aspiration to the models provided by that culture, the more ornate his narratives became. For example, in the 1930s he apparently asserted that he came from the White Sea coast, son of a very young and pious mother and an ageing father, a whaler who died in an ice floe.³⁸ While there is remarkable discontinuity between this and earlier autobiographical narratives, there is striking *continuity* between it and the autobiography provided for the evidently fictional Nikolai Kliuev, the protagonist of *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi*.

Only in recent years have the mass of archival publications and the emergence of new memoirs made it possible to disentangle at least some of the various strands of Kliuev's claimed autobiographies. Moreover, his own mytho-autobiographical texts have now been published (whereas before they were quoted in fragments), and thus it has become possible to see them more clearly as *aesthetic, programmatic* statements — just as the continuity between his autobiographical stories and the

³⁸ Khristoforova-Sadomova, 'Vospominaniia o poete Kliueve Nikolae Alekseeviche', p. 154.

fictional narrative of *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi* suggests one should — as well as statements of actual individual identity. Nonetheless, these texts often continue to be discussed largely in terms of true/untrue (the poet must have/cannot have lived as an ascetic novice on Solovki; the poet must have/cannot have been the ‘psalmist’ of a sectarian group; the poet must have/cannot have known Rasputin and the Imperial family).³⁹ And even though the new publications of the glasnost' period and beyond have made clear that Kliuev's own statements were the principal source for many earlier biographies, some recent accounts of the poet have repeated without interrogation earlier dubious third-party assertions, and a few have even added to them. Gleb Sit'ko's work on Kliuev the Old Believer takes at face value Kliuev's accounts of his early religious experiences and travels; a travelogue by the editorial board of the journal *Aurora* assumes the poet's apprenticeship on Solovki; N. Nezhinets not only assures readers that Kliuev was sent by his mother to the Solovetskii Islands, but also asserts that the poet's experiences there ‘provided the basis for lyric poems which subsequently came out as separate collections (*Peal of the Pines*, 1911, *Fraternal Songs*, 1912, *Forest Tales*, 1913, *Secular Thoughts*, 1916)’ — that is to say, Nezhinets ascribes to the Islands the inspiration for the majority of Kliuev's poetic output for the best part of a decade; a recent Anglophone source has Kliuev entering the Solovetskii Monastery in 1898, while repeating other unattested details from Kliuev's autobiographical statements, but since the same source also relocates Kliuev's birthplace to ‘Volgograd region [...] Siberia’, even a casual reader might identify warning signs; moreover, even learned commentators are likely to accept many of Kliuev's claims uninterrogated — a folklorist writing about prayer beads, and quoting Kliuev's lines on the subject, is happy to see the poet as a ‘priestless Old Believer from the White Sea coast’; more striking yet is the fact that O. Voronova, author of one of the best new works on Esenin, and a student of Russian popular religion, seems to take many of Kliuev's claims about his links to popular religion at face value.⁴⁰ The recurrence of these motifs may be

³⁹ The thrust of much of Azadovskii's work on Kliuev's autobiographical statements has been to reveal them as ‘play’ (*igra*): *Žizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*, p. 83, while more sanguine commentators on his autobiographies read them less suspiciously, although, nowadays, somewhat more cautiously than in the past — for example, A. I. Mikhailov in his introduction to *Serdtshe edinoroga* (pp. 11–12).

⁴⁰ Gleb Sit'ko's ‘Nikolai Kliuev: put' poeta-staroobriadsa’, online <<http://staroobryad.narod.ru/kluv.html>> [accessed 6 October 2005]; V. Vetrogonskii, Genadii Gubanov, Rudolf Kucherov, Valerii Pimenov, and Eduard Shevelev ‘Vytegorskaia ekspeditsiia Avrory: poeticheskii okean olonetskogo veduna’, *Aurora*, 11/12, 1996, p. 10; N. Nezhinets, ‘Poet velikoi strany, ee krasoty i sud'by: k 110-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia N. Kliueva’, *Biblioteka*, 8, Moscow, 1994 p. 60; N. Cornwell (ed.), *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, London and Chicago, IL, 1998, p. 454; I. Kilachitskaia, “‘I baba s lestovkoi buddiiskoi’”, *Žhivaia starina*, 4 (40), 2003, p. 24; O. Voronova, *Sergei Esenin i russkaia dukhovnaia kul'tura*, Riazan', 2002, pp. 222–24.

partly explained by inertia — Boris Filippov's long and sophisticated essay on Kliuev, introducing the 1969 collected works, made extensive use of available sources, but generally accepted the northern-exotic, sectarian-Old-Believer provenance of the poet; and many subsequent accounts seem to have relied on Filippov.⁴¹ However, the ideological power of this image of the poet also helps to explain its longevity: the construction of northern, peasant Russianness in the modernist period does not lose, but rather gains force in the late Soviet and post-Soviet eras, when the mythology of an irretrievably lost, but very *recent* Russia can elide the aesthetic and programmatic dimensions of Kliuev's literary identity in favour of a literal interpretation (which itself ignores the problems of locating 'core Russianness' in a geographical, cultural, confessional and even ethnic periphery). It seems that today Kliuev, as proof of the spiritual and intellectual potential of the 'popular principle', is not only a seductive, but apparently necessary image for many commentators on national culture. So necessary that what by now seem to be obvious problems with at least the more primitive versions of the image are readily elided.

For others, of course, that image is an equally appealing target. Thus, intense and even personal animosity has been remarkably evident among Kliuev's leading scholars and editors, and the continued polarization of opinions on his life and works has been abundantly clear in recent scholarly discussions of the poet. The issues of national identity and authenticity, inherited from early twentieth-century discussions have, in these polemics, gained new colouring derived from the institutional, political and even ethnic contexts of late-Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.

Three scholars, in particular, stand out for their role in publishing the poet's work, work about him, and their own interpretations of his life and works from the 1970s to the present. Sergei Subbotin, a senior scholar at IMLI (The Institute of World Literature in Moscow), has meticulously edited Kliuev's poems, prose and correspondence.⁴² The

⁴¹ Boris Filippov, 'Nikolai Kliuev: materialy dlia biografii', Nikolai Kliuev, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1, pp. 14–24.

⁴² Among Subbotin's many publications are: *Nikolai Kliuev: issledovaniia i materialy*, ed. S. I. Subbotin, Moscow, 1997 (hereafter *Nikolai Kliuev: issledovaniia i materialy*), containing an article and a publication of Kliuev's correspondence by the scholar; Nikolai Kliuev, *Solovki*, ed. with intr. ('K istorii publikuemogo teksta') by Sergei Subbotin, *Novyi mir*, 3, 1989, pp. 229–32 (the first publication of Kliuev's fragmentary *poema* on the Solovetskii Islands, which contributed further material to the debate on the poet's contact with the far north); S. I. Subbotin, 'Proza Nikolaia Kliueva v gazetakh "Zvezda Vytegry" i "Trudovoe slovo" (1919–1921 gody). Voprosy stilia i atributsii', *Russkaia literatura*, 4, 1984, pp. 136–50 (the first significant study of Kliuev's prose, and a major republication of Kliuev's Vytegra journalism); 'Nikolai Kliuev v poslednie gody zhizni: pis'ma i dokumenty (Po materialam semeinogo arkhiva)', ed. with introduction and commentary by Georgii Klychkov and Sergei Subbotin, *Novyi mir*, 8, 1988, pp. 165–201; Nikolai Kliuev, *Pesnoslov*, ed. with intr. by S. Subbotin and I. Kostin, Petrozavodsk, 1990.

Petersburger Konstantin Azadovskii, a leading figure in Russian literary scholarship, but very much an outsider among Kliuev specialists in Russia, wrote the first and so far only 'life and works' study of Kliuev (recently expanded), having spent many years publishing Kliuev materials, mostly from Petersburg archives, and edited the poet's letters to Blok, also recently published in an expanded edition.⁴³ Another Petersburger, Aleksandr Mikhailov, who has written extensively on the 'new-peasant poets' in general, has also published a great deal of and on Kliuev.⁴⁴ In more recent years these three scholars have been joined by many others, outstanding among whom are Liudmila Kiseleva from Kiev, Elena Markova from Petrozavodsk and Liudmila Iatskevich from Vologda (the geography of Kliuev scholarship is as informative as his own poetic topography). Kiseleva and Iatskevich have both gathered around them significant groups of scholars, producing fine scholarship, especially on Kliuev's poetics, language and thematics.⁴⁵

Until near the end of the Soviet period, whatever scholarly and other differences there were among the Kliuev pioneers and their followers were not publicly visible, but since the late 1980s the conflicts have been more than obvious to the reader's naked eye. The disputes among the *doyens* of Kliuev studies are particularly evident. Azadovskii has attacked Mikhailov openly, and Subbotin implicitly, while the last two, and a

⁴³ In addition to his biographies of Kliuev, his edition of Kliuev's letters to Blok, and his edition of Kliuev's 'Gagar'ia sud'bina', to which reference is made above, Azadovskii is the author or editor of numerous Kliuev publications. Examples include: 'Olonetskaia derevnia posle pervoi russkoi revoliutsii (Stat'ia N. A. Kliueva "S rodnogo berega")', *Sotsial'nyi protest v narodnoi poezii*, *Russkii fol'klor*, 15, Leningrad, 1975, pp. 200–09; 'Ranee tvorcestvo N. A. Kliueva', *Russkaia literatura*, 3, 1975, pp. 190–212; 'Stikhotvoreniia N. A. Kliueva 30-kh godov: Sbornik "O chem shumiat sedye kedry"', *Baikal*, 3, 1978, pp. 49–53; Nikolai Kliuev, "'Ia slavliu Rossiiu ..." Iz tvorcheskogo naslediiia', ed. K. M. Azadovskii, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 8, 1987, pp. 101–12; 'Lichnost' i sud'ba Nikolaia Kliueva', *Neva*, 12, 1988, pp. 177–88; "'Menia on nazval 'kitezhanokoi'": Anna Akhmatova i Nikolai Kliuev', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 5, 1989, pp. 66–71; Nikolai Kliuev, 'Stikhi raznykh let', ed. K. M. Azadovskii, *Rodnik*, 6, 1988, pp. 18–20.

⁴⁴ Key works include: A. I. Mikhailov, *Puti razvitiia novokrest'ianskoi poezii*, Leningrad, 1990; 'Motiv dvoemirna v poezii Esenina i Kliueva', *Traditsii i novatorstvo v sovetskoi literature*, ed. D. D. Ivlev, Riga, 1986, pp. 83–104; "'Zhuravli, zastignutyie v' iugoi ..." (N. Kliuev i S. Esenin)', *Sever*, 11–12, 1995, pp. 142–54; 'Avtobiograficheskaia proza Nikolaia Kliueva', *Sever*, 6, 1992, pp. 146–59 (hereafter, 'Avtobiograficheskaia proza Nikolaia Kliueva'); 'K istorii odnoi družby (N. A. Kliuev i A. N. Iar-Kravchenko. Po materialam chastnogo arkhiva)', *Annales instituti philologiae slavicae universitatis debreceniensis de Ludovico Kossuth nominatae, Slavica*, 28, 1997, pp. 103–16; 'K istokam poeticheskogo fenomena Nikolaia Kliueva', *Vytegra: kraevedcheskii al'manakh*, vypusk 1, Vologda, 1997, pp. 251–77; 'Nikolai Kliuev i mir ego poezii', in Nikolai Kliuev, *Serdse edinoroga*, Petersburg, 1999, pp. 7–74.

⁴⁵ Many examples of the scholarship of Kiseleva and those around her at Kiev can be found on the very extensive and very well-presented web site 'Kliuevoslov', <<http://kliuev.org.ua/>>, while the three numbers of the *Kliuevskii sbornik* (Vologda, 1999, 2000 and 2002) and L. Ia. Iatskevich, S. Kh. Golovkina and S. B. Vinogradova, *Poeticheskoe slovo Nikolaia Kliueva*, Vologda, 2005, display the range and depth of the work of Iatskevich's group.

significant number of other Kliuev students, have followed a line more or less diametrically opposed to Azadovskii's.

At the risk of reductive and schematic readings, the differences can be summarized thus: Azadovskii has tended to see Kliuev first and foremost, at times exclusively, as an author who re-made himself in response to the demands and expectations of Russian modernism, and its view of the Russian 'people'. Consequently, he has devoted considerable energies to dismantling Kliuev's myth of himself. He has also written with some sympathy of those who accused Kliuev of 'plagiarism' (for example, Kliuev's erstwhile sponsor Brikhnichev).⁴⁶ It seems that Azadovskii's hostility towards certain aspects of the poet on whom he has worked so long has grown with the increased appropriation of that poet to an ideology and aesthetic which he evidently finds in and of itself unwelcome. Mikhailov and others have, on the contrary, continued to elevate the poet as a natural, national product, and have assimilated the new information to a modified version of Kliuev's own account of himself. Subbotin, especially, and Mikhailov, for the most part, have been temperate in their judgements on these matters but, as will be seen, more ideologically driven authors have explicitly seen Kliuev as an ethnic-Russian victim of alien-inspired repression. Others, without a clear ideological agenda, nonetheless promote Kliuev, in the words of Vitalii Shentalinskii, the journalist and poet who discovered and published the Lubianka materials, as a 'sanctuary of Russian spirituality and beauty' ('zapovednik russkoi dukhovnosti i krasoty').⁴⁷ This remark speaks volumes for the place on the cultural spectrum where Shentalinskii would locate the poet, and is interesting testimony to the appeal of the popular, national element in Kliuev's image, since Shentalinskii's work (for example, with the files of 'repressed' intellectuals to which he had access in the KGB archives) is quite free of the ethnic exclusiveness and even neo-fascist polemics which are evident in the works of others aiming to popularize Kliuev.

None of Kisileva, Markova and Iatskevich has engaged in the sort of polemics which have sometimes characterized the activities of their capital city *confrères* (here it is apposite to note, in addition to geographic diversity, the role of gender differences among Kliuev scholars), but the Kliuev whom they have studied is also a very telling figure. Markova's work, much of it collected in her book of 1997, presents a poet who embodies the encounter of Slavic and Finno-Ugric cultures, often in profound ritual forms.⁴⁸ It is also noteworthy that her analysis

⁴⁶ Azadovskii, *Zhizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*, pp. 93–96; see also Azadovskii's discussion there of Gollerbakh's claim that Kliuev participated in the forging of icons (p. 217).

⁴⁷ Vitalii Shentalinskii, 'Vestnik Kitezha-grad', preface to Nikolai Kliuev, *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi: fragmenty poemy*, Moscow, 1991, p. 5.

⁴⁸ E. I. Markova, *Tvorchestvo Nikolaia Kliueva v kontekste severnorusskogo slovesnogo iskusstva*, Petrozavodsk, 1997.

of Kliuev's autobiographical prose is entitled 'Zhitie Nikolaia Olonetskogo' (The Life [*Vita*] of St Nicholas of Olonia).⁴⁹ Iatskevich, whose research group has produced remarkable and invaluable work based around a frequency dictionary of Kliuev's poetry, has herself written a series of works in which Kliuev is presented as enacting a re-sacralization of Russia.⁵⁰ Kisileva has developed a line of scholarship also devoted to an exploration of the sacred and organic content of the poet's work.⁵¹

Of the more polemically inclined authors attracted to Kliuev in recent decades, the most prominent example is provided by the Kuniaevs, father and son — well-known authors on the neo-nationalist right. In 1987 — early in the period of open polemics initiated by glasnost' — the ideological conflict between camps was made clear when Azadovskii published a lengthy and highly critical review of a new edition of Kliuev, edited by the Kuniaevs.⁵² Azadovskii enumerated many biographical and textual errors, even identified examples of apparent plagiarism in the apparatus, and also challenged the accuracy of the view of Kliuev presented in the preface. Although Azadovskii's review is full of specific (and well-founded) criticisms, the underlying theme seems to be that the author presented by the Kuniaevs is the wrong Kliuev. A year later, Sergei Subbotin also published a lengthy review of the Kuniaev edition, in which he also took the editors to task,

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 59–85.

⁵⁰ Key works include: L. G. Iatskevich, 'Poeticheskaia geografiia Nikolaia Kliueva' — note the maps charting the toponymics of 'Kliuev's Holy Russia', pp. 190–91; "'Sil'ny ne zhelezom . . .'" (Otrazhenie natsional'nogo samosoznaniia v poezii Nikolaia Kliueva), *Vologda: kraevedcheskii al'manakh*, vypusk 2, Vologda, 2000, pp. 367–74; 'Imena Boga i Bogoroditsy v poezii N. A. Kliueva', 'Bibleiskie imena v poezii N. A. Kliueva', *Kliuevskii sbornik*, vypusk 3, 2002, pp. 19–26, 26–32.

⁵¹ Key works include: Liudmila O. Kiseleva, 'Poema "Pogorel'shchina" v kontekste obraznogo myshleniia N. A. Kliueva', *Voprosy russkoi literatury*, 57, L'vov, 1991, pp. 31–42; 'Khristianstvo russkoi derevni v poezii Nikolaia Kliueva', *Pravoslavie i kul'tura*, 1, 1993, pp. 59–76; 'Russkaia ikona v tvorchestve Nikolaia Kliueva', *Pravoslavie i kul'tura*, 1, 1996, pp. 46–65; 'Esenin i Kliuev: Skrytyi dialog (popytka chastichnoi rekonstruktsii)', *Nikolai Kliuev: issledovaniia i materialy*, ed. S. I. Subbotin, Moscow, 1997, pp. 183–98; 'O nekotorykh motivakh, svyazannykh s obrazom Egoriia Khrabrogo, v poezii N. A. Kliueva', *Pravoslavie i kul'tura*, 1–2, 1997, pp. 28–49; "'Plach o Sergee Esenine" N. A. Kliueva', *Stoletie Sergeia Esenina: Mezhdunarodnyi simpozium, Eseninskii sbornik*, vol. 3, Moscow, 1997, pp. 282–96; 'Mifologicheskaia semantika "musora" v poezii Nikolaia Kliueva', *Studia Litteraria Polono-Slavica*, 4, 1999, pp. 253–68; 'Mif i real'nost' staroobriadchestva v "Pesni o Velikoi Materi" Nikolaia Kliueva', *Vytegra: kraevedcheskii al'manakh*, vol. 2, Vologda, 2000, pp. 210–23; 'Staroobriadcheskaia aksiologiya slova i bukvy v poezii N. A. Kliueva', *Pravoslavie i kul'tura*, 1–2, 2002, pp. 54–74. Ten of Kiseleva's articles, including three of those listed above, were to be found on the 'Kliuevoslov' website, at <<http://kluev.org.ua/academia/>>, as of October 2005.

⁵² Konstantin Azadovskii, 'Vokrug Kliueva: spornoe i neosporimoe', *Znania*, 9, 1987, pp. 230–32. The review is of N. A. Kliuev, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, ed. St. and S. Kuniaev, introduction by St. Kuniaev, Arkhangel'sk, 1986.

especially for textological errors, while pointing out many of the positive aspects of their work.⁵³ But the second part of his own review is devoted to a polemic with Azadovskii's. Here, the textological questions which inevitably arise in any assessment of scholarly editions, and arise in especial quantity and complexity in the case of many Soviet-period authors, give way to a more direct and specific debate with Azadovskii himself. Part of this discussion is dominated by familiar issues of archival, or even personal politics — Subbotin pointed out that only Azadovskii had been able to gain access to the full manuscript of Kliuev's *Kogda shumiat sedye kedry* (When the Grey Cedars Sigh), the collection prepared in 1933 by Kliuev, but never published. However, Subbotin also takes Azadovskii to task for his classification of Kliuev as *merely a samobytnyi krest'ianskii poet* (original peasant poet) — in which classification Subbotin sees a denigration of Kliuev, whom he considers an appropriate member of the first class of the Russian poetic pantheon. Subbotin here precisely identifies the point on which Azadovskii is at variance with most other scholars who have published extensively on the poet.

Kliuev's martyrdom, as is predictable, receives implicit or explicit ideological treatment in the writing of the neo-nationalists, both journalism and scholarship. Indeed, the first extensive and documentary treatment of the poet's death came in an article published in the right-wing journal *Nash sovremennik* in 1989.⁵⁴ In such places, especial efforts are made to identify Kliuev's persecutors (and, by implication, the persecutors of Russia as a whole) as the familiar ethnic *other* — it was, of course, the Jews who killed Kliuev. The author of the 1989 article uses names, patronymics and original last names to identify unambiguously as Jewish Kliuev's persecutors from the NKVD. Major publications of newly discovered works by Kliuev himself also took place in *Nash Sovremennik* and *Moskva*, while a significant archival discovery was announced in the neo-fascist newspaper *Den'* — confirming the highly ideologized context for the poet's return.⁵⁵ When Vitalii Shentalinskii,

⁵³ Sergei Subbotin, 'Na putiakh k Nikolaiu Kliuevu', *Sever*, 5, 1988, pp. 108–13. The brother of the late Anatolii Iar-Kravchenko (Kliuev's lover in the late 1920s and early 1930s) also has some harsh words for Stanislav Kuniaev's treatment of Kliuev: B. Kravchenko, 'Bolee soroka epitetov k slovu "oblako"', *Voprosy literatury*, 5, 1993, pp. 344–45 (hereafter, 'Bolee soroka epitetov k slovu "oblako"').

⁵⁴ Iurii Khardikov, "'Krov' moia . . . sviazuet dve epokhi" ssska i gibel' Nikolaia Kliueva', *Nash sovremennik*, 12, 1989, pp. 179–89.

⁵⁵ Besides Mikhailov's publication of a major Kliuev correspondence in *Nash sovremennik*, referred to in note 6 above ('Ot poezii "izbianogo kosmosa" k pis'mam iz Sibiri (Pis'ma Nikolaia Kliueva k N. F. Khristoforovoi-Sadomovoi iz Tomsk)'), perhaps the most important appearance Kliuev has made in that journal is "'Ty, zhguchii otrpyk Avvakuma . . .'", the publication by the pseudonymous S. Volkov of the fragmentary *poema Kain* discovered in Kliuev's KGB file: *Nash sovremennik*, 1, 1993, pp. 92–98). This publication was repeated by its — now identified — author(s) in Stanislav Kuniaev and Sergei Kuniaev, *Razterzanyye*

who himself, as has been seen, was to write favourably of Kliuev as a national figure, discovered that the Moscow KGB file contained previously unknown and significant texts, he was called by associates of *Nash sovremennik* and advised not to publish his materials in one of the main-line journals (as he eventually did), but in *Nash sovremennik*, since ‘Kliuev is ours’ (that is, belongs to the neo-nationalist right).⁵⁶

The story of the publication in the early 1990s of Kliuev’s longest piece of autobiographical prose, ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’ (The Loon’s Fate), is also telling of the polemics around the poet, even when the ethno-political element is less evident. *Sever* (North), the Petrozavodsk journal which played a prominent role in Kliuev’s return, was the first to publish it in 1992. This publication, with introduction and notes, was the work of Mikhailov.⁵⁷ Having waited so long to see the light of day, ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’ enjoyed the luck, characteristic of the chaotic state of Russian publishing in the late and immediate post-Soviet years, of appearing twice in rapid succession, in different journals, and with different editors, for in 1993 Konstantin Azadovskii published it in Moscow’s *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, accompanied by a long essay and fuller apparatus.⁵⁸ His essay (which concludes with highly critical comments on Mikhailov who, he claimed, should not have published ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’ at all and, having published it, should have done a better job of it) was provocatively entitled ‘O “narodnom” poete i “sviatoi Rusi”’ (On the ‘people’s’ poet and ‘holy Russia’) and, indeed, attacked not only the ‘Kliuev myth’, but also the system into which that myth was often inserted by others writing on the poet.

Azadovskii, as has been seen, had attacked readings of Kliuev before, but this was his most powerful statement. In personal terms, it seemed for some time that this was also a valedictory gesture. Moreover, as not only his book, but also his entry on Kliuev in an authoritative biographical dictionary of Russian writers made clear, he was lukewarm in his evaluation of the works of the 1930s, emerging from the

⁵⁵ *Continued*

teni: izbrannye stranitsy iz ‘del’ 20–30-kh godov VChK-OGPU-NKVD, zavedennykh na družei, rodnykh, literaturnykh soratnikov, a takzhe na literaturnykh i politicheskikh vragov Sergeia Esenina, Moscow, 1995, pp. 204–28. B. Kravchenko, in his ‘Bolee soroka epitetov k slovu “oblako”’ (p. 344), refers to Sergei Kuniaev’s announcement in *Den’* (31 May–6 June 1992) of this archival discovery. Subbotin published a selection of Kliuev’s prose in *Moskva: Nikolai Kliuev, ‘Krasnyi nabat’*, ed. Sergei Subbotin, *Moskva*, 11, 1987, pp. 20–32. The publication of scholarly materials in these journals is cited here to indicate the interest the journals may be assumed to have in the figure of Kliuev, not the ideological agenda of individual scholars — most publications of Kliuev by Subbotin and Mikhailov have been either in ‘main-line’ capital-city journals, or in journals and almanacs associated with Karelia and the Russian north.

⁵⁶ Personal communication, October 1994, confirmed 22 September 2004.

⁵⁷ Aleksandr Mikhailov, ‘Avtobiograficheskaia proza Nikolaia Kliueva’, pp. 150–56.

⁵⁸ K. Azadovskii, ‘O “narodnom” poete i “sviatoi Rusi”’ (‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’ Nikolaia Kliueva); Nikolai Kliuev, ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’, ed. K. Azadovskii, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 5, 1993, pp. 88–102, 103–21.

archives of the KGB — that is to say, to the poet who most clearly articulated a vision of Soviet Russia as a Satanic, even apocalyptic catastrophe. Those works — *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi* and the cycle 'Razrukha' (Destruction), which had so thrilled Vitalii Shentalinskii when he discovered and then published them — were given short shrift indeed by Azadovskii.⁵⁹ Azadovskii's position is not only interesting in and of itself, but also emblematic of the attitudes of the 'philological' and 'literary' elites as a whole — Kliuev was a stylizer of great talent at his best, unreadable at his worst, an eccentric product of literary modernism. Perhaps as a result, so much scholarship on the late poetry (as on Kliuev in general) has been produced and, for the most part, published away from the capitals: Kiev, Petrozavodsk and Vologda have already been mentioned as centres of Kliuev scholarship; Tomsk and Daugavpils (Latvia) are also as likely imprints as Moscow or St Petersburg, reinforcing impressions of yet another important set of polarities for the reception of Kliuev — 'the provinces' and the capitals.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, what was material for ironic quotation marks in Azadovskii's treatment was simply quotation for less-well-known writers — Vladimir Semenko's essay "'Sviataia Rus'" Nikolaia Kliueva' (The 'Holy Russia' of Nikolai Kliuev), republished in his collection *Vremia tserkvi* (Time of the Church) presents a very different understanding of Kliuev's 'Holy Russia' from Azadovskii, as does Shershneva's essay on the same subject; other authors are even more sanguine.⁶¹ Shershneva

⁵⁹ *Russkie pisateli 1800–1917: biograficheskii slovar'*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1992, pp. 555–59. Here Azadovskii barely mentions Kliuev's work after 1922, and *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi* only makes it to the concluding list of 'other works'.

⁶⁰ Pichurin's book on Kliuev's last days, published in Tomsk, has already been cited, as have Markova's Petrozavodsk book *Tvorchestvo Nikolaia Kliueva*, Kiseleva's Kiev-published articles, and the work of Iatskevich's Vologda group (see notes 7, 46 51, and 52 above). Tomsk has also produced, among other works: collections based upon papers presented at two major conferences: *Nikolai Kliuev: obraz mira i sud'ba* was followed in 2005 by the proceedings of a second conference, *Nikolai Kliuev: obraz mira i sud'ba. Sbornik statei*, ed. A Kazarkin and V. Domanskii, 2005; note, too, V. Domanskii, *Narym: Kliuev v Sibiri*, Tomsk, 2003. The publication of the most complete version to date of Kliuev's correspondence with Iar-Kravchenko and — most important of all — of Kliuev's previously unpublished and long-awaited *Narym poema Kreml'* was in Tat'iana Kravchenko and Aleksandr Mikhailov, *Nasledie komet: neizvestnoe o Nikolae Kliueve i Anatolii Iare*, Moscow-Tomsk, 2006 (hereafter, *Nasledie komet*), and was subsidized both by the Tomsk mayor's office and by the city's primary university. Eduard Meksh, *Obraz Velikoi Materi (religiozno-mifologicheskie traditsii v epicheskom tvorchestve Nikolaia Kliueva)*, Daugavpils, 1995, is Latvia's most important contribution. Needless to say, the claimed print runs of most of these publications are tiny (actual numbers may be even smaller): for Meksh — 200; for the 2000 and 2005 volumes of Tomsk proceedings 300 and 250, respectively; for Markova — 300; for each number of the Vologda-produced *Kliuevskii sbornik* — 100, and for the same city's *Poetichskoe slovo Nikolaia Kliueva* — 105. Pichurin was the biggest exception with 2,000, although the newest volume cited, *Nasledie komet*, with its Moscow-Tomsk imprint, claims 1,000.

⁶¹ Vladimir Semenko, *Vremia tserkvi*, Moscow, 1998 (hereafter, *Vremia tserkvi*), pp. 9–32; G. N. Shershneva, 'Tema "Sviatoi Rusi" v tvorchestve N. Kliueva kontsa 20-kh nachala 30-kh godov', *Religia i tserkov' v kul'turno-istoricheskom razvitiu Russkogo Severa (K 450-letiiu*

writes that the late Kliuev correctly and literally described Soviet Russia as demonic, while his ‘Holy Russia’ is the ‘incarnation of Russian spirituality with such characteristic traits as Christian piety, the “silent prayer”, the harmonic unity of man and nature, active serving of people, love of God and love of man. [. . .] For him “Holy Russia” always remained not so much an ideal, attributed to the distant past or the even more distant future, as a living, real force, which assists the cleansing and spiritual restoration of a person today’.⁶² Semenko, who quotes Khomiakov in his exposition of Kliuev’s ‘Holy Russia’, takes as given the literal content of the episode in *Pogorel’shechina*, when the village holy men leave: ‘Those real divine forces, that real grace, which was present on the Russian land, which permeated “Holy Russia” is [*sic*] now abandoning it.’⁶³

It is very clear from the diametrically opposed approaches to Kliuev’s elaboration of a popular, national idea not only that the authors of such approaches have quite different understandings of how and why the new-peasant modernist constructed his images of his homeland, but also that they have very different understandings of that homeland and its fate today, and that Kliuev provides a very useful means to authorize them. Again, a common paradigm of Russian culture in and after the Soviet period can be detected: a voice that might have had one kind of resonance, had it been heard in its own time, can sound quite different when heard *for the first time* in a quite different period. Here a double nostalgia must operate — nostalgia for Kliuev’s nostalgia for a disappearing world, coloured also by the sense of new, imminent catastrophe in the post-Soviet context. Shershneva and Semenko, for example, seem to call explicitly for, in the latter’s words, ‘a time of the church’, while fearing that modern times are, in fact, quite different (another of Semenko’s essays reveals his ideology quite transparently in its title: ‘The Liberal Terror and the Spiritual Principle’).⁶⁴

Beyond the realms of printed literary scholarship and literary journalism, the paradoxes are even more evident, as a brief search of the World Wide Web will very eloquently reveal. Kiseleva’s group has

⁶¹ *Continued*

Prepodobnogo Trifona, Viatского Chudotvorca). *Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii*, vol. 2, Kirov, 1996, pp. 87–90 (hereafter, ‘Tema “Sviatoi Rusi”’). For these authors, as for Iatskevich in her ‘Poeticheskaia geografiia Nikolaia Kliueva’, the preferred orthography is *Sviataia Rus’* — the initial letters of each word capitalized; Azadovskii demonstratively reduces the adjective to lower-case. Among numerous other examples of such an approach to Kliuev is S. G. Semenova’s ‘Poet ‘poddonnoi’ Rossii (religiozno-filosofskie motivy tvorchestva Nikolaia Kliueva)’, *Nikolai Kliuev: issledovaniia i materialy*, pp. 21–53.

⁶² Shershneva, ‘Tema “Sviatoi Rusi”’, pp. 88, 90.

⁶³ Semenko, *Vremia tserkvi*, p. 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

produced an elaborate and very sophisticated site devoted to Kliuev, where many works by her group, and some by others, can be found; their site was preceded into cyberspace by another fine site devoted to all the New-Peasant Poets, created in Moscow by web designers close to Sergei Subbotin: *Tvorchestvo novokrest'ianskikh poetov*.⁶⁵ These sites are expressive of a considerable sympathy for the New Peasant poetic and cultural agenda — the home page of the Moscow site displays an evocative rural landscape, across which pass the words ‘A v serdtse svetit Rus’ (‘And in the heart old Russia shines’ — the fourth line of Esenin’s ‘O pashni, pashni, pashni’ [O ploughed fields, ploughed fields, 1917]). Yet they are also exemplary of another paradox characteristic of the positioning of Kliuev: the poet-archaist, author of programmatic criticism of urban culture and industrial modernity, is served today by some of the most elegant products of new technology in the Russian literary Internet. As a whole, of course, the Russian Internet is strikingly ‘literary’ and textual, even in its less ‘main-stream’ corners, and Kliuev also features in more eccentric products, among which pride of place is occupied by a ‘radio mystery’, ‘Nikolai Kliuev — prorok sekretnoi Rossii’ (Nikolai Kliuev — prophet of a secret Russia), which at one time could not only be read but also heard at the website of Arctogaia (i.e., ‘northern land’).⁶⁶ Arctogaia is the work of Aleksandr Dugin and other erstwhile ‘National Bolshevik’ leaders, who provide in their publications and pronouncements an intoxicating and eccentric list of cultural heroes, from Lautréamont to apparent masters of the modern erotic.⁶⁷ Kliuev is joined in Dugin’s own pantheon by Yurii Mamleev, and less-well-known Russian authors, united, if at all, by their purported anti-Westernism (not to mention their membership of certain national groups, rather than others).

The World Wide Web will also compel the Russophone reader to address an aspect of Kliuev’s identity, cultural and individual, which most Western readers would think highly significant but which has received relatively little treatment in scholarship — his homosexuality. No discussion of his sexuality will be found in the two scholarly sites described above, but Kliuev will be found on Russian gay sites, such as www.gay.ru, where he is a member of the site’s pantheon of Russian

⁶⁵ For the Kiev site, see notes 45 and 51. *Tvorchestvo novokrest'ianskikh avtorov* is at <<http://nk-poety.narod.ru/>> [accessed 6 October, 2005].

⁶⁶ Text at <<http://www.arctogaia.com/public/fm/finis15.htm>> [accessed 6 October, 2005], and at other places on the internet. At one time an audio download was also available.

⁶⁷ On Dugin and the National-Bolshevik Party, which he helped to found, see Stephen Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements*, Armonk, NY and London, 2001, pp. 190–99, and the prison memoir of Dugin’s erstwhile ally Eduard Limonov, *Moia politicheskaia biografia*, St Petersburg, 2002, pp. 63–81.

authors.⁶⁸ This is in marked contrast to most treatments of him in print, whatever the particular author's position on the ideological continuum. To this day, scholarly publications of and on the poet are often extremely hesitant to approach the subject of Kliuev's sexual orientation. Coy references to 'Socratic' sins, opaque remarks about the poet's usual 'indifference to women' or his 'fatherly friendship' for his young lover of the late 1920s Iar-Kravchenko, and even cuts in post-Soviet publications of correspondence are the clearest markers of this caution.⁶⁹ When asked why they choose not to write of his homosexuality, Russian scholars tend to reply that it is not relevant, nor of interest to the Russian reader. Moreover, publications from and references to Kliuev's Lubianka file, with details of the poet's Moscow arrest and interrogation, have generally indicated that he was charged and convicted of only one crime — his 'anti-Soviet activity' — whereas there were in fact not one but *two charges*, and the other charge, his homosexuality, has so far been largely omitted from public discussion.⁷⁰ This omission, as was explained in a private conversation with one of the first authors to publish material from Kliuev's KGB files, was to prevent the reading public from concluding that the poet was 'just some faggot' (*kakoi-to pedik*).⁷¹ It should be added, however, that the twenty-first century has brought some changes: for example, in a plenary address to the International Kliuev Conference organized in 2004 by the Petrozavodsk branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences to mark the 120th anniversary of the poet's birth, the same author suggested that it was time to address fully and clearly Kliuev's homosexuality and

⁶⁸ <<http://www.gay.ru/art/literat/library/index.htm>> [accessed 6 October, 2005]. The twentieth-century Russian authors listed are: Anna Akhmatova, Tat'iana Vechorka, Zinaida Gippius, Sergei Esenin, Riurik Ivnev, Nikolai Kliuev, Mikhail Kuzmin, Andrei Nikolev, Sofiia Parnok, Marina Tsvetaeva and Evgenii Kharitonov.

⁶⁹ The general tone is well illustrated by Mikhailov's publication of Kliuev's letters to Iar-Kravchenko: 'Led i iakhont liubimyykh zrachkov', *Sever*, 10, 1993, pp. 132–48; the same editor, presenting Kliuev's letters to Nadezhda Khristoforova-Sadomova, refers to the accusation of 'sokratovskii' *kriminal* made against Kliuev ("Prostitute. Ne zabyvaite . . .", *Sever*, 9, 1994, p. 120). The publication by Iu. Orlitskii, B. Sokolov and Sergei Subbotin of Kliuev's correspondence with Shiriaevets notes that in letters 25 and 27 (both by Kliuev) short passages 'nosiashchie intimnyi kharakter' have been cut ('Aleksandr Shiriaevets. Iz perepiski 1912–1917 gg.', *de visu*, 3 [4], 1993, pp. 6–7). These examples are cited not to impugn the integrity of individual scholars, but to illustrate the cultural contexts into which Kliuev is placed and from which he is omitted. A recent and somewhat eccentric exception to this general rule is N. M. Soltseva, *Strannyi eros: intimnye molitvy poezii Nikolaia Kliueva*, Moscow, 2000, but this book is far from the scholarly mainstream.

⁷⁰ Shentalinskii's publications from the KGB archive make no mention of the second charge. Nor does Pichurin refer to it in his book on Kliuev in Tomsk.

⁷¹ Private conversation with Vitalii Shentalinskii, October 1994.

its meaning for his life and work.⁷² His remarks did not provoke discussion, however, and few members of the audience seemed likely to heed the call. Publications of Kliuev's Tomsk file finally provided full details of his convictions, but even the latest scholarly accounts of Kliuev's martyrdom have been extremely cautious on this topic: Azadovskii's revised and expanded biography does address it, but with apparent timidity.⁷³ On the other hand, one of the most elegant summary portraits of the poet and his poetry produced in recent years is in the famous 'guide', *Drugoi Peterburg* (The Other Petersburg), where the pseudonymous K. K. Rotikov, having no ideological axe to grind on Kliuev in his witty and elegant account of gay Petersburg, seems able to write of the poet in a more balanced manner than most.⁷⁴ In the (also rather limited) Western writing on homosexuality in Russian culture, Kliuev features, and at times prominently, but far less comfortably than other Russian modernists — the new-peasant homosexual is an unfamiliar, even unrecognizable type, it might be suggested, wherever he is described.⁷⁵

Here, in fact, lies one of the keys to the paradoxes of Kliuev's identities, and the multiple appropriations of those multiple identities. Kliuev is such a complex and, indeed, extraordinary figure, that he might be expected to resist most of the obvious appropriations. For example, although his pronouncements, his aesthetics, his religious beliefs, and his martyrdom make him a suitable figure for the ideologues of the right, the uncomfortable fact of his homosexuality remains. And even if that is not a problem (dismissed as 'his own private business', or regarded as the 'dark side' of an otherwise shining paragon), then his sheer difficulty as a poet makes him far less appealing than Esenin, to make an obvious comparison. Esenin, and Esenin's death in particular, have been much discussed, often in hysterically nationalist (and

⁷² V. Shentalinskii, "'Pesnia Gamaiuna" (Nikolaï Kliuev v arkhivakh Lubianki)' paper presented at the plenary session, 21 September 2004, 'Mezhdunarodnaia konferentsiia, posviashchennaia 120-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Nikolaia Kliueva, Olonetskie stranitsy zhizni i tvorchestva Nikolaia Kliueva i problemy etnopoetiki', 21–25 September 2004, Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Karel'skii nauchnyi tsentr, Institut iazyka, literatury i istorii. Shentalinskii repeats these remarks in the conference proceedings: *Dvadtsat' pervyi vek na puti k Kliuevu*, pp. 310–14.

⁷³ See note 8 above. Azadovskii also addresses Kliuev's romance with Iar-Kravchenko but, again, with relative caution — *Zhizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*, p. 286, even though its nature is well attested in Kliuev's correspondence with Iar-Kravchenko, especially those parts presented in *Nikolaï Kliuev: issledovaniia i materialy* (pp. 253–94), and even more abundantly now in *Nasledie komet*.

⁷⁴ K. K. Rotikov, *Drugoi Peterburg*, 2nd edn, Petersburg, 2001, pp. 184–94.

⁷⁵ Kevin Moss (ed.), *Out of the Blue: Russia's Hidden Gay Literature — An Anthology*, San Francisco, CA, 1996, gives Kliuev two pages; by comparison, Kuzmin receives fifty-eight, Riurik Ivnev eleven, and Anatolii Shteiger four.

prejudiced) terms.⁷⁶ And, indeed, Esenin, for all his contradictions, is a much more natural candidate for popular right-wing cultural hero, not least for his accessibility as a poet, but also for those aspects of his biography which unite him with several other 'new-peasant poets' (Vasil'ev, Klychkov, and others) as models of a particular type of 'Russianness'. His sexual promiscuity and, especially, his alcoholic profligacy — marked not only in his biography, but also in his poetry, most obviously in the 'Moskva kabatskaia' (Tavern Moscow) cycle — are totally alien to Kliuev the poet and man. Yet they are familiar as part of a popular, perhaps now over-popular and degenerate, version of 'Russianness' à la Dmitrii Karamazov. The clearest line of descent in these cultural-ological terms from the 'new-peasant poets' must thus lead to the poet Nikolai Rubtsov, the posthumous cult of whom is facilitated, not obstructed, by the fact that he was killed, while drunk, at the hands of the woman he lived with (at a time of year apparently predicted in one of his own poems).⁷⁷ Nor is it surprising to find that, just as there is nothing of Kliuev's image in the life of Rubtsov, so there is nothing of Kliuev's hybrid, often anti-lyric poetry in the pure, even primitive, lyricism of Rubtsov the poet. Moreover, it might be added, Kliuev, unlike some other 'new-peasant poets', and quite unlike many of their modern readers, was most interested in the rather abstract qualities which he saw endowed in Russia's popular culture, ancient and modern — the aesthetic integrity of East and West; the peasant house as a microcosm of culture and even of the universe; the unity of man and nature in spiritual harmony; the potential for learning, wisdom and religion to thrive outside society's formal institutions. These were not interests that led naturally to some kind of nationalist exclusionism, and Kliuev seems not to have been inclined to make the sort of remarks (especially, antisemitic remarks) which pepper the discourse of some of his fellow peasant-poets.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ For a survey of nationalist and antisemitic treatments of Esenin's death, see Gordon McVay's review article, 'The Centenary of Sergei Esenin: A Survey of Publications', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 76, 1998, pp. 512–24; note, too, McVay's comments there on the work of the Kuniaevs (pp. 510–11).

⁷⁷ The very extensive web site 'Dusha khranit: Zhizn' i poeziiia Nikolaia Rubtsova' (<<http://rubtsov.id.ru/>>) provides ample evidence of the continued popularity and cult status of Rubtsov, more than thirty years after his death. Rubtsov's poem 'Ia umru v Kreshchenskie morozy' has, inevitably, been cited as prophetic (the poet died on 19 January 1971).

⁷⁸ Azadovskii cites two accounts which may be read as illuminating Kliuev's views on the 'Jewish question'. Predictably, they are contradictory. The first is the quite well-known view of Kliuev held by Esenin's female entourage of 1923, and presents Kliuev as antisemitic; the second is the poet Semen Lipkin's account of Klychkov and Kliuev's discussion of ethnicity and nationality among poets (Azadovskii, *Zhizn' Nikolaia Kliueva*, pp. 201–02, 271–73). The first account seems unique among memoirs of Kliuev in presenting the poet as explicitly antisemitic, and it should be borne in mind that there was no love lost between Kliuev and Esenin's female admirers. The second might be given more credence because it records the poet as praising Heine, whom other memoirists report him as admiring (see Ivanov's memoir, discussed above).

Just as Kliuev's homosexuality, while apparently a vital key to understanding his life and, perhaps, the multiple facets of his self-presentation, has been largely overlooked by 'mainstream' Russian readers and writers, so too Kliuev's changing relationship to political authority and power awaits a fully satisfactory account, even though such an account might shed a great deal of light both on the man and on the shape of his career. Moreover, just as reference to his sexuality might discourage reductive readings of the poet and his work, so too a sober account of his dealings with political power might also discourage polarization in approaches to him. Indeed, even the outline contours and chronology of those political relationships — partially drawn in discussions of his poetry above and easily identified in published biographies — provide further illustration of the complexity and contradictions of the poet's biography, while, as is predictable, the poet's autobiographical statements in this area are far from transparent. As a very young man, Kliuev participated in anti-government political activity and was under police surveillance, which led to arrest and imprisonment. However, during the First World War, Kliuev wrote patriotic verse and, like Esenin, he enjoyed the favours and support of circles close to the Imperial Family (apparently reciprocating only with some reservations, although he was to treat with great sympathy the last tsar and his family in the Soviet period, both in his autobiographical texts and in *Pesn' o Velikoi Materi*). He greeted the Bolshevik coup with enthusiasm (again, like Esenin), even writing the — eccentrically positive — cycle *Lenin*, and joining the Bolshevik party; yet by the early 1920s he was *persona non grata* with that party, and he had clearly changed his stance and his view of the country's fate, although he continued to make intermittent attempts to render himself acceptable. In the later 1920s and early 1930s he wrote evidently apocalyptic accounts of contemporary Russia. In 1934, when arrested for his homosexuality and his supposedly anti-Soviet poetry (including those apocalyptic accounts), he responded to interrogation — according to the published NKVD transcripts — with remarkable fortitude and with direct criticism of Soviet policies; yet in his first place of Siberian exile he wrote the *poema Kreml'* (Kremlin), praising his gaolers and appealing for clemency. Later in 1934 he was moved to Tomsk, where in early 1937 he was again arrested, interrogated, released, after which (in all likelihood) he wrote, in his last known work, a remarkable, visionary statement of his own place in Russian letters as the 'pevets olonetskoi izby' (singer of the Olonian peasant hut) in 'Est' dve strany: odna — Bol'nitsa' (There are two countries: one is the Hospital), a work that provides a dramatic contrast to *Kreml'*. The survival of a copy of *Kreml'* (in the archive of Iar-Kravchenko) had been known for many years, but it was only

published in 2006.⁷⁹ It remains to be seen whether this publication will encourage more all-embracing accounts of the poet's complex and contradictory dealings with power (which, of course, were by no means atypical for his generation of intellectuals and writers), necessitating, as must all such treatments of those many victims of Stalinism who attempted reconciliation with authority, sober, tactful and humane narratives that confront historical realities without ideological posturing.

The reasons why Kliuev is little read by the 'philological elite' have already been suggested — perhaps principal among them is the fact that his work lies beyond what have turned out to be the main paths of development of Russian verse since the early twentieth century. The form of Russian modernism represented by Kliuev did not engender a line of descent into the present, whereas other branches (for example, Acmeism, or the work of late Mandel'shtam, or the avant-gardists of OBERIU) lead more or less directly to many exemplars of Russian poetry in the late twentieth century — from Brodsky to Dmitrii Prigov.

The reasons why Kliuev is little read by 'general readers' of Russian poetry, in addition to the circumstances explored above, also include, of course, the simple facts of demographic change. If the world that Kliuev appeared to come from and about which he claimed especial authority seemed remote to the educated readers of the 1910s (and its remoteness was repeatedly emphasized by them and by him), then it must now be acknowledged first that what remains of that world is far more remote to most educated urban Russians today than it was then; secondly that it is no more physically accessible today, for, notwithstanding the energetic expeditions to remote parts of the country undertaken by both *fiziki* and *liviki* from the 1960s on, travel to Russian villages away from the main *dacha* areas requires considerable effort and local knowledge; thirdly that, by general European standards, the Russian countryside is at more of a cultural and educational disadvantage with respect to the capitals in the early twenty-first century than it was in the early twentieth, and fourthly that it is, perhaps, even more ideologically obscured now than then. Moreover, little indeed remains of the fabric of that world anyway, after the demographic, social, political and cultural changes and cataclysms of the twentieth century, many of them witnessed or anticipated by Kliuev himself (that destruction, of course, contributing to the ideological obscurity). The poet's own native region is illustrative. For example, very little is left of the actual villages from which Kliuev himself emerged. As of 2003, Zhelvachevo, the small *derevnia* within the *selo* of Makachevo, and the place from which Kliuev began his correspondence with Blok, had three full-time residents, all

⁷⁹ Kravchenko and Mikhailov, *Nasledie komet*, pp. 203–23.

pensioners; Koshtugi, the village in which he was baptized, continues to haemorrhage population.⁸⁰ It is hard to imagine a figure anything like Kliuev emerging today from a Russian village. Of course, he was an exceptional figure for his own time, but he had at least something in common with other village writers of the period, from Esenin to Chapygin, while later twentieth-century ruralism has been quite different in character.

Thus, while twenty-first century appropriations of and polemics around Kliuev might seem to repeat the original debates, closer inspection reveals them as doing so with the powerful additive of ideological nostalgia: the reconstruction of Kliuev's own reconstruction of the peasant world, as is suggested in the approaches of Shershneva and Semenko, among many others. This double perspective of nostalgia and mythologization is surely one of the reasons why an author who, as suggested above, might be expected to resist simple appropriations, in fact provides an arena for highly polarized debate.

Among Kliuev's own texts, nothing illustrates this more clearly than 'Gagar'ia sud'bina'. The polarities of interpretation indicated by the approaches to it of Mikhailov and Azadovskii in recent years have already been noted, but it is worthwhile returning to examine other aspects of the text and its contexts, exemplary of the poet.

It was recorded (apparently from Kliuev's dictation or from a written text of the poet himself) by Kliuev's friend and amanuensis Nikolai Arkhipov in 1922. Its physical status as a text (not actually *written* by the poet himself) replicates its marked ambiguity as a statement of the poet's identity and, *a fortiori*, as an autobiography. As the polar attitudes of Mikhailov and Azadovskii suggest, Kliuev's version of himself and the Russian peasant world presented in 'Gagar'ia sud'bina' appeals powerfully to those seeking a nostalgic mythologization of national identity, while those hostile to such appropriations must tend to seek evidence of fraud in the poet's account of his life. The text is episodic in form and very diverse in referential contexts. It begins with Kliuev's birth — unusual, and marked by a clear combination of Christian and

⁸⁰ In the late nineteenth century the *selo* of Koshtugi consisted of seventeen separate *derevni* stretching out along the rivers Megra and Kimreka, and the total population numbered over 1100 (*Programma shkol'nogo prazdnika 'S rodinykh beregov donositsia poklon', posviashchennogo 118-oi godovshchine so dnia rozhdeniia N. A. Kliueva*, Koshtugi school, 19 October, 2002; *Po Kliuevskim mestam Vytegorii*, Vytegra, 1993, p. 4). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the total village population seems to be below 300, and Koshtugi school, with an enrolment of around twenty pupils in a village with a low birth rate, is in danger of being closed; approximately half of the *derevni* that once comprised the *selo* have disappeared; nothing at all remains of one Koshtugi's two churches, while the other — reconsecrated in the 1990s after serving for many years as a club and then a barn — is in a state of near-collapse and, in the summer of 2003, was somewhat dangerous to enter (although it is used for occasional, apparently informal, services).

pagan elements (he was 'baptized' by a peasant woman, in a vat used for making bread). His education was equally noteworthy: the future poet learned to read from ancient prayer books, saw visions as an adolescent, and had miraculous dreams after his beloved mother's death. Twice he lived on the Solovetskii Islands, and there he enjoyed the status of a respected and much-visited hermit and ascetic. But on the advice of an elder who came to see him and talked of Eastern religions, he turned to sectarianism and became a 'Christ' (i.e., a flagellant). He spent two years as the psalmist of a sectarian group in Samara, before escaping on the eve of the ritual castration planned for him. Then he went to the Caucasus, where he was taken captive by a swarthy band of youths, who took their pleasure of him by turns. His memories of his lover Ali, whose heart Kliuev broke when he left, remain fond to this day. Travelling all over Russia, he eventually came to Moscow, made the acquaintance of men of letters, but disliked city life and educated company. He fled, via St Petersburg, to his home region. There his mother foresaw and prepared for her death, which he continues to lament. None of his works is worth a single song of hers. As a youth, in the company of a group of *skoptsy*, he visited Tolstoi at Iasnaia Poliana. For refusing to serve in the military, Kliuev was imprisoned. In all he was imprisoned three times, on one occasion attracting the favours of the murderer Dubov. The guards, resenting his humility and silence, beat him mercilessly. During a pilgrimage in the far north, the young Kliuev had encountered Grigorii Rasputin, whom he later visited on Gorokhovaia Street in St Petersburg. Kliuev was taken to read his poetry before the Empress. He also visited the Empress's sister, Elizaveta Feodorovna, in Moscow. Such were the twists and turns of his life.

'Gagar'ia sud'bina', along with Kliuev's other recorded autobiographical tales, and his oral narratives (all of them, while individually distinct, share certain features), as has been noted, very clearly provided the basis for many accounts of the poet's life written by others, beginning with the articles about him published in the 1910s, continuing through the memoirs of him in the 1920s and the 1930s, the Western narratives of the 1950s and 1960s, and the late Soviet-period equivalents.⁸¹ But since the autobiographical texts were, for the most part, not published in full until the last two decades but known only through partial quotation and second-hand summary, they added further potential for confusion, as well as for dispute about who and what the poet actually was, and what he had actually done. It is paradigmatic that the

⁸¹ Kliuev's autobiographical narratives are collected in Kliuev, *Slovesnoe drevo*, pp. 29–47. Only a few of the shorter autobiographical notes were published during the poet's life times. The longer pieces were preserved in archives and quoted in fragmentary form by various scholars until finally published in full over the last two decades.

publication of ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’, Kliuev’s longest and most evidently ‘literary’ autobiography, far from resolving disputes about the poet’s identity, merely defined more clearly the arena of conflict and sharpened the polemics.

Azadovskii, it will be recalled, dismissed Kliuev’s popular identity and his ‘Holy Russia’, while Mikhailov asserts the modified authenticity of the text: although ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’ may seem not like a ‘reliable, but rather an invented description by the author of the events of his life’, it is nonetheless an autobiography: ‘it is the autobiography of his spiritual life, which is the most important thing for a creative personality.’⁸² However, what is, for the most part, absent in their discussions is as telling as the attempts to deconstruct or reconstruct the autobiographical mythology. For example, each scholar addresses at some length biographical issues, but largely neglects the question of genre which, as the summary above surely indicates, is begged both by the content and structure of the text. Tat’iana Ponomareva is the only other scholar to have written at any length on ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’. She is more circumspect and yet more comprehensive in her treatment. In her book on Kliuev’s prose (published with a tiny print run of 300 and thus, like several other major publications discussed in these pages, essentially inaccessible to all but the most resolute of non-specialists), she devotes twelve pages to it.⁸³ She reads it partly against the models of ecclesiastical literature, and notes such stylistic features as the recurrence of metrical phrases and the emulation of oral narration. Her approach eschews, to all intents and purposes, the polarities generated by discussions of veracity and authenticity, thereby delineating a quite different and, it might be argued, more promising outline for future discussion both of the autobiographical texts and of Kliuev’s various forms of life-construction in general. She confronts the interpretive spirals which any reading of Kliuev seems to generate: according to her, there are signs of the ‘hagiographic genre’, Kliuev repeatedly employs triadic construction, and often resorts to abstraction; yet the text also makes ample use of concrete, everyday detail, is modelled to a significant degree on modernist forms, and has a clear programmatic direction in its treatment of such episodes as the visit to Tolstoi. Ponomareva also remarks the dual status of Kliuev’s autobiographical prose — ‘notes’ for

⁸² Mikhailov, ‘Avtobiograficheskaia proza Nikolaia Kliueva’, p. 141.

⁸³ T. A. Ponomareva, *Proza Nikolaia Kliueva 20-kh godov*, Moscow, 1999 (hereafter, *Proza Nikolaia Kliueva*), pp. 92–104. For details of other tiny print-runs among Kliuev publications, see note 60. For an expanded version of her treatment of ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’, see T. A. Ponomareva, *Novokrest’ianskaia proza 1920-kh godov*, 2 vols, Cherepovets, 2005 (yet another provincial publication with a claimed print run too small to ensure widespread accessibility: 300), vol. 1, pp. 126–62. See also her ‘Zhitiinaia traditsiia v “Gagar’ei sud’bine” N. A. Kliueva’, *Nikolai Kliuev: obraz mira i sud’ba*, 2005 (see note 60), pp. 34–45.

one's intimates, like the memoirs of the eighteenth century; but also fragments of an unfinished literary project, presumably intended for publication, and having much in common with other Russian literary memoirs of the twentieth century.⁸⁴ In literary-critical terms, her reading seems exemplary, yet it is unique in the limited literature on Kliuev's prose and barely cited by others working on the poet.

Recent years have seen — at long last — the publication of reliable, scholarly editions of Kliuev's prose and poetry, and the casual observer might have expected that general discussion of Kliuev, aided by these more or less complete editions, would now be moving to a reconfiguration of the ideological and cultural matrices in which the poet would be placed (the direction, in fact, indicated by Ponomareva's analysis of 'Gagar'ia sud'bina').⁸⁵ However, new scholarship seems largely to continue to reproduce the fault lines of the past.

Azadovskii, who appeared to have bid farewell to Kliuev with his critical commentaries of the mid-1990s, returned in the twenty-first century. His review in 2000 of the new academic edition of Kliuev's poetry attacked once again the 'myth' of Kliuev and its contemporary propagators (targeting Mikhailov in particular); in 2004 he repeated, in passing, these attacks, while writing a review of the new academic edition of Kliuev's prose, in which he repeatedly took to task the editor (Aleksandr Garnin) for professional failings.⁸⁶ In 2002 he published a significantly expanded version of his 1990 biography; in 2003, as noted above, he published in book form his edition of Kliuev's letters to Blok; and in 2004 he published a 200-page edition of 'Gagar'ia sud'bina' (the text itself occupies a mere nineteen pages), together with an expanded and revised essay on the poet ('Nikolai Kliuev — tvorets i mifotvoret's [literally 'Nikolai Kliuev — creator and myth-creator']) and a more detailed apparatus. Azadovskii's new books stand beside (and often in clear contrast to) a series of other recent and major Kliuev publications, many by the scholars discussed above. His revised biography cites further examples of Kliuev the fraud (and plagiarist and even forger), and his new edition of 'Gagar'ia sud'bina' asserts repeatedly that Kliuev the poet of the people was a product of Russian modernism — although, in a qualification which, if expanded, could move the debate beyond its current polarities, Azadovskii acknowledges that Kliuev, in his portrayal of the catastrophe which overtook his country, can be seen truly as a poet of the people (*voistinu narodnyi poet*).⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ponomareva, *Proza Kliueva*, pp. 106–08.

⁸⁵ The new, academic editions are Kliuev, *Serd'tse edinoroga* and *Slovesnoe drevo*, introduced in footnotes 3 and 23 above.

⁸⁶ Konstantin Azadovskii, review of Nikolai Kliuev, *Serd'tse edinoroga*, *Novaia russkaia kniga*, 1, 2000, 27–29, and 'Po belomu avtografu' (review of Nikolai Kliuev, *Slovesnoe drevo*), *Voprosy literatury*, 5, 2004, pp. 344–57.

⁸⁷ Azadovskii, 'Gagar'ia sud'bina' *Nikolaia Kliueva*, p. 76.

On the other hand, the status of *narodnyi poet*, more broadly understood, seems beyond dispute in the essays of Mikhailov, and in the interpretive essays of Iatskevich and her group, Markova, and Kiseleva and the other Kiev scholars. Equally characteristic is the fact that, when ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’ is discussed, Ponomareva’s reasoned approach to Kliuev’s biographical prose, in which the immanent literary features of the works and their genre markings are assessed soberly, is ignored completely (Azadovskii makes no mention of her work in his 2004 edition of ‘Gagar’ia sud’bina’). The ongoing bitterness of the polemic among Kliuev scholars is further attested by Subbotin’s review of *Slovesnoe drevo*, which provides a powerful riposte to Azadovskii (and continues the intensely personal dispute of the 1980s exchange over the Kuniaevs’ edition).⁸⁸

Nor are these sustained polarities restricted to Kliuev specialists. Far from it. For example, Nikita Eliseev’s review of *Serditse edinoroga*, provocatively entitled ‘Krest’ianskii Maiakovskii’ (The peasant Maiakovskii), belongs in the Azadovskii camp.⁸⁹ On the other hand, Vladimir Bondarenko, writing in the neo-fascist newspaper *Zavtra*, has no qualms in asserting that ‘Kliuev brought to the world secret mysteries of the people’ (‘Kliuev nes miru sokrovennyye narodnye tainy’).⁹⁰ Bondarenko, employing Kliuev’s own terms *izbianoi rai* and *muzhitskaia Rus’*, concludes his article:

I don’t know if today’s pillagers of the peasant-hut Heaven and peasant Russia will notice the one-hundred-and-twentieth anniversary of the great Russian poet. Maybe they will put it to their own use, cutting from the block of his poetic pedestal fragments of all that is accessible to them — the infernal Kliuev. Let them search for those fragments. We value Kliuev not for that. Behind Kliuev hides the true, ‘flesh-and-blood’ Christ. Behind him — the people’s Russian kingdom, which has not yet disappeared. The people’s Holy Russia.

Thus, in the worlds of scholarship and journalism, Kliuev remains a hotly disputed and highly ideologized figure. The heat of the disputes and the degree of the ideologization must surely discourage and obstruct any attempts to read him in a context where more philologically-oriented instruments might be of use, and make highly unlikely any reintegration of Kliuev into a story of Russian literature told more in terms of language, forms, aesthetics and literary ideas than politics.

⁸⁸ S. I. Subbotin, ‘O belovyikh avtografakh, o “brendakh” i ne tol’ko’, *Nash sovremennik*, 6, 2005, pp. 270–76.

⁸⁹ Nikita Eliseev, ‘Krest’ianskii Maiakovskii’, *Peterburgskii knizhnyi vestnik online*, 8 (11), 1999, <<http://bookman.spb.ru/11/Kluev/Kluev.htm>> [accessed 24 June 2005].

⁹⁰ Vladimir Bondarenko, ‘Velikaia kliuevshchina’, *Zavtra*, 17 September 2004 <<http://dlib.eastview.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=3>> [accessed 24 June 2004, within the Eastview database of Russian newspapers, through the website of the University of Michigan Libraries].

In partial contrast to the savage academic and cultural polemics, however, is the enthusiastic appropriation of the poet, largely without the overt ideological agenda of capital-city cultural politics, in his native region (broadly defined) where, in recent years, local identity has been energetically articulated through the poet. School children throughout the Vytegra region now learn and recite the poet's verse, investigate his local ties, commemorate his associations to the area in school museums, and even publish scholarship on the poet.⁹¹ He is, indeed, a key element in the attempts of local schools to replace Soviet forms with new statements of identity — for example, Kliuev figures prominently in a number of school museums and at some school events which, in the Soviet period, would have focused primarily on the official account of the building of socialism and the fighting of the Great Patriotic War in the region. Several local schools (among them, School no. 1 in Vytegra and the village school of Deviatiny) now conduct ethnographic expeditions, the significance of which seems to be pedagogically reinforced by the ability to relate features of local — disappearing — folk culture to the work of a major national poet. Kliuev even helps to bring the capital cities to his *petit pays*, albeit in small numbers — Vytegra has hosted an annual Kliuev meeting for nearly twenty years, and has an impressive Kliuev museum (albeit rarely visited by passing tourists).⁹² At a session of the *Kliuevskie chteniia* in 2000 a member of the local administration, in his welcome address to participants, noted his distress when, during interviews he conducted of young men called up

⁹¹ For examples of the work of local schoolchildren on Kliuev and on ethnography, see the almanacs *Oloniia: sbornik tvorcheskikh rabot po fol'kloru i kraevedeniū uchashchikhsia srednei shkoly no. 1 g. Vytegry Vologodskoi oblasti*, ed. A. L. Kazakov, Vytegra-Cheliabinsk, 1998, and *Prionezh'e ("Oloniia-2"): Literaturno-kraevedcheskii i etnograficheskii sbornik rabot uchashchikhsia g. Vytegry i Vytegor'skogo raiona Vologodskoi oblasti*, ed. A. L. Kazakov, Vytegra-Cheliabinsk, 2002. Other locally produced materials relating to Kliuev include not only the brochure *Po kliuevskim mestam* cited in note 80, but also *Vytegorskii vestnik*, 1, 1994, which consists of selected papers presented at the Kliuev readings in Vytegra from 1985 to 1994. A second number is planned. *Vytegra: kraevedcheskii al'manakh*, one of a series of local-studies almanacs devoted to administrative regions of the Vologda oblast' (see notes 4, 44, 45, 50 and 51; volume 3 was published in 2005), contains works by local authors and capital-city scholars. The three numbers published so far contain ten articles on Kliuev among a total of sixty-six items on topics ranging from natural history and geography to ethnography and local history.

⁹² For a rather unsympathetic treatment of Vytegra and of the survival of Soviet forms there, see Petr Vail', 'Do Vytegry i posle', *Itogi*, 26 September 2000, pp. 57–63. This article, by a well-known journalist and writer, in a prestigious, glossy magazine, is expressive of the relations between capital-city culture and the 'provinces' in general. It completely neglects the struggles of the local museum to re-make itself with very limited funding, and is inevitably ignorant of local research on the darker sides of twentieth-century history, which left a considerable imprint on the area (the article seems to assume — incorrectly — that there is no such research). Its overall view of the provincial north, however, is not without pertinence. That the Kliuev museum is not a popular stop for tourists whose cruise ships dock at the Vytegra quay was confirmed by Tamara Makarova, the Director of the main town museum, of which the poet's museum is a branch (personal communication, October 2005).

from the area to the armed forces, one recruit was unable to identify 'Nikolai Kliuev' (Western observers might well speculate on how many recruits to their national armies would be able to associate any poet with any region). At a time of deepening crisis for all of rural Russia, Kliuev serves this area as a means of cultural self-assertion. Yet even the enthusiastic adoption of this native son by the Vytegra region is shot through with ironies and paradoxes, not the least of which are the poet's own flight from that area in the early 1920s and his negative portraits of Vytegra in a number of works.⁹³ The contrasts between local discourse on the poet and capital-city polemics also serve to reinforce the impression that many of the ideological constructions of national culture and the Russian countryside within which Kliuev is placed today have relatively little import or even impact *in situ*. Residents of Kliuev's own home region seem far less likely than their fellow-citizens in the capitals to think in terms of 'pillagers of the peasant-hut Heaven and peasant Russia' and 'the people's Holy Russia'.

For the most part, however, the reader of today, looking for publications of and about Nikolai Kliuev, will enter an arena of deeply contentious disputes, within which it is possible for the less ideologically invested to discern a series of intriguing paradoxes. Among them is the fact that quite another image and account of the poet could be attempted: Kliuev, although tied to aspects of popular and ancient culture, was very much a product of his own day; and, although devoted to his own concepts of self and country, he was also open to other cultures, and tolerant of other world views; discreetly but consistently he followed his own sexual orientation, wrote of its meaning, and died partly because he was persecuted for it; in his later verse he correctly anticipated the worst consequences of Soviet policy towards his country, and wrote extensively of the damage done when vernacular national culture, widespread 'spiritual' values and, last but by no means least, the very ecological balance of nature itself are undermined in the interests of modernity; he produced astonishing (and astonishingly difficult) texts across a range of genres, texts which not only require but also reward reading and re-reading. This, of course, is exactly the sort of image and set of criteria which might appeal to some sort of notional 'general reader' in the West, were there an accessible, 'readable' Kliuev for that reader. It is no surprise to find that, in Russian approaches to him today, there is far less of this image evident than of the disputed issues discussed above. Instead of a Kliuev 'from the people', and quite different as a consequence from his fellow-poets, but nonetheless

⁹³ See note 4 above.

formed by Russian modernism and by his own learning, current writers in his homeland tend to choose one or the other — popular Kliuev or taught Kliuev. In doing so, they demonstrate not only that Russian literature continues to provide territory for savage political battles, but also how the identity and cultural ownership of Kliuev illuminate the ideological polarities between which (and often at which) the identity and ownership of the country itself are claimed.