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THE POET AS PRETENDER: POETIC LEGITIMACY IN TSVETAEVA

Sibelan Forrester, Swarthmore College

Marina Tsvetaeva's writing devotes particularly rich attention to gender, both as a world-structuring dichotomy and as a factor in her own position and status as a poet.¹ From her earliest works Tsvetaeva explores and exploits gender in poetry; later, her mature prose works consider its significance for her life and work. This article will address the ways gender motivates and shapes her lifelong interest in rebels and imposters, be they artistic or political. Tsvetaeva first concentrates on pretenders in 1916, as she declares her poetic "independence"; in 1917–20, she naturally uses the figure of the political imposter in reaction to events in Revolutionary Moscow; and, in the 1930s, her prose treats rebellious figures such as Pugachev (in Pushkin's telling) or Mayakovsky (in his own), analyzing poetry's relationship to political power and artistic legitimacy. After exploring some questions of political legitimacy in Tsvetaeva's poetry, I will turn to her presentation of two very different poets who are attracted to historical pretenders, and who prove, in her opinion, to be pretenders themselves. The woman poet's particular challenge to literary authority gains legitimacy through Tsvetaeva's reading of all poets as subversively Other and politically dangerous.

In 1918, in Revolutionary Moscow, Tsvetaeva wrote this brief poem about the origins and status of verse:

Каждый стих — дитя любви,	Every verse is a love child,
Нищий незаконнорожденный.	A beggar born unlawfully.
Первенец — у колес	A first-born, laid by the wheel-rut
На поклон ветрам — положенный.	In tribute to the winds.

The author wishes to thank the anonymous *SEEJ* readers for their very helpful comments and suggestions.

1. Not surprisingly, given Soviet and Russian attitudes towards feminism, most scholars who have applied feminist analysis to Tsvetaeva are North American, British, French or German, with many fewer Russians. So much of the founding scholarship devoted to Tsvetaeva in North America and Western Europe has addressed questions of gender that lists of these works and authors are provided in any work on the author.

Сердцу ад и алтарь,	The heart's hell and altar,
Сердцу—рай и позор.	Heart's paradise and shame.
Кто отец?—Может—царь.	Who's the father? Maybe a tsar.
Может—царь, может—вор. ²	Maybe a tsar, maybe a thief.

This surprisingly rich little poem raises the issue of a poem's legitimacy in distinctly political terms. Although here Tsvetaeva's poet is a mother with a mother's experiences, the verse ends with the crucial question, "Who is the father?" As the "love child's" unmarried mother, whose writing threatens to disrupt the system of masculine power relations, the woman poet passes her troubling status on to her offspring. Poetry raises the issue of legitimacy because for Tsvetaeva the poet is a pretender. In other words, by pretending to be something she is not, the poet becomes both a liar and a threat to political and social order. This awareness underlies Tsvetaeva's fondness for such pretenders as Napoleon, Pugachev, the False Dimitry, or Marina Mniszek.

The poem "Каждый стих—дитя любви" implicitly makes the poet a mother; Tsvetaeva frequently equates the poetic process with women's role in reproduction (Forrester 245–46). She essentializes female anatomy and physical experience, balancing this poetic biological imperative with the assumption that *all* poets, not only women, share this relationship to their creative work. Writing poetry and making it public through recitation and publication leave the protective and often repressive realm of women's private domestic life for the realm of public discourse. The poetic child in the poem is thus given to the wind, in a distinctly non-Christian ceremony beside the wheel-rut of the high road. A single mother cannot confer legitimacy in patriarchal society (or literature); she must first marry, accept a man's name and legal mastery. The question of a poem's paternity remains, as if to foreground paternity's legal and linguistic rather than physical aspects. In addressing the social standing of the poet and her offspring, the question "Who is the father?" on one level realistically reflects patriarchal society's demand to know the new child's place and identity. In Russian this is exacerbated by the father's contribution to naming: without the patronymic, which only a man can provide, a Russian name has a gaping hole in the middle.³ Besides the name, the father in patriarchy determines a child's status, wealth, and class. Read in these terms, a woman's poetry can have neither name nor status, will be a beggar outside the law, unless a father can be named to establish the "child's" place in society.

This poem's last two lines seem at first to offer the same extremes as the

2. Tsvetaeva, *Собрание сочинений в 7-и томах* (henceforth, *SS7*), 1/2: 105. All translations are my own and strive for accuracy of meaning more than aesthetic value.

3. A famous example of Russian abhorrence of the lack of patronymic occurs in Fëdor Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. The town persists in asserting Smerdiakov's relationship to Fëdor Karamazov by calling him "Pavel Fëdorovich." One exception to the rule that patronymics form from men's names is the fairy tale Maria Morevna, to whom Tsvetaeva refers with approval; another is the daughter of Baba Yaga, Yaginishna—not an example most women would want to emulate.

rest of the poet-mother's experience: the father may be a tsar or a thief. This could express a poet's yearning to see her verse vindicated in her own lifetime, when it "grows up" and becomes part of its own national tradition, but that reading does not exhaust the possibilities of the final lines. The tsar represents authority, while the thief practices rebellion or subversion, with the poet vacillating between them. Readers of feminist theory might also identify the tsar as an embodiment of traditional authorship, where the creator of a written work enjoys all paternal rights, while the woman writer becomes a "voleuse de langue" (Hermann; Ostriker), stealing the language of the Father to use it in "unlawful" ways and treating the father's claims with irony. On the other hand, the difference between tsar and thief appears in their claims as fathers: authority demands its due, while a thief flies by night. The tension between tsar and thief expresses two irreconcilable relationships towards linguistic and literary tradition.

Other factors, however, undermine the opposition between tsar and thief. The verb "может," used thrice in the poem's last two lines, means both "maybe" and "can," as if to render tsar and thief equal in their male biological ability to father children. More to the point, where was the Russian tsar in 1918? Political authority is not eternal, and, since yesterday's tsar may have been a thief the day before, the distinction between authority and rebellion is unstable.⁴ The final lines of Tsvetaeva's poem both stress and question the relationship of the poet's activity to social, historical, and political reality. When political authority claims the right not only to censor but also to inspire poetic works, it reaches beyond a feudal *droit de seigneur* to demand an heir. Transforming reality by creating new "love-children" will bring the poet into conflict with the powers that be—whichever they may be.

Lyrical poetry, emphasizing the speech and identity of a single individual, constantly creates and describes beings who have no place in the social structure of authoritarian society; hence the identity of their father—their author's *renommé*—takes on great significance. The primary being created by the lyric poet is the writer herself, Marina Tsvetaeva, who thereby arrogates the right to name herself from both father and mother. Naming the self is already imposture, *Samozvanstvo*. This word from Russian history and politics means literally "self-calling," or perhaps "self-declaring"; it refers to the false heirs to the throne who would appear in defiance of Russia's central authorities, especially in periods of interregnum (Perrie 1–2). The pretender, *Samozvanets*, claims to be the true heir who survived under mysterious circumstances,⁵ and claiming

4. Compare the poet's "marriage" to time in Tsvetaeva's 1932 essay "Поэт и время": "Брак поэта с временем — насильственный брак" [The Poet and Time: "The poet's marriage with time is a forced marriage" (*SS7*, 5/2: 21).

5. In most well-known cases from Russian history, the "mysterious" circumstances are violent: Dimitry's murder or accidental death in Uglich, the murder of Peter III, supposedly organized by Catherine II herself. The pretender enters where violence has torn open a breach.

the name means claiming the identity and power that go with it. Like the poet's self-naming, this is either real or potential imposture. The words *Samozvanets* and *Samozvanka* have implications as rich as their English translation, 'pretender': people who speak as someone else, who pretend to be someone else as children and poets do, threaten the established order of society and culture.⁶

Through the pretender the poet assumes an ambivalent relation towards authority. The poet's version of history may point to the transience of earthly rule and question official versions created to support the legitimacy of those in power, but that does not necessarily mean a rejection of power. The label of pretender has been given to individuals who tried to usurp authority, perhaps briefly succeeded, but ultimately lost and were punished for their pretense. Punishment makes the pretender a victim of the power structure she or he challenged, creating a sort of ritual sacrifice that cleanses the pretender of the hubris of questioning power, which so often means desiring power. Only the lack of official recognition after death separates the pretender from the martyred saint, another figure Tsvetaeva appreciates.⁷ Her love and admiration for pretenders explains the curious respect for Valery Briusov in her memoir, "Герой труда" [A Hero of Labor]. Briusov's lack of natural poetic talent makes his decision to write poetry anyway an example of *samoborstvo* [fighting against the self] (SS7, 4/1: 16); she compares him to Napoleon and a wolf, who are typically positive figures in her writing. Like Napoleon, though, Briusov is really a lover of power rather than a poet; he readily accommodates to political authority in order to secure an artistic authority that is essentially political. Actually achieving power in any but the figurative sense would freeze a poet into immobility and stagnation, whereas failure and expiatory sacrifice lead to an afterlife in art and folklore.⁸

This love for rebellion, or rather for individual rebels, leads Tsvetaeva on philosophical principle to oppose any established power, even power which was revolutionary until yesterday. Indeed, in "Искусство при свете совести" [Art in the Light of Conscience, 1932] she makes love for rebels a *sine qua non* of the poet:

Поэта, не принимающего какой бы то ни было стихии—следовательно и бунта—нет. Пушкин Николая опасался, Петра боготворил, а Пугачева—любил. [...] Найдите мне

6. Burgin notes another dimension of the threat to "legitimate" authority in Tsvetaeva's poem "Я пришла к тебе черной полночью" [I came to you at black midnight, 1916]. Lesbian love figures as a "pretense" that challenges the rights of the husband. "[Tsvetaeva] ultimately did return to her 'true tsar' (*istinnyi tsar*), her husband Sergei Efron, calling others 'pretenders' (*samozvantsy*) in her poem to him of April 27, 1916. This poem was written the day after Tsvetaeva's 'good-bye' poem to Parnok and appears just after it in *Versty II*" (Burgin 433).

7. See my "The Broken Body: Sex, Martyrdom, and Poetry in Marina Cvetaeva," presented at the 2006 AATSEEL conference.

8. For example, Stenka Razin, another of Tsvetaeva's favorite historical-cum-literary rebels. See the cycle "Stenka Razin" (SS7, 1/2: 29–32).

поэта без Пугачева! без Самозванца! без Корсиканца!—*внутри*. У поэта на Пугачева может только не хватать сил (средств). *Mais l'intention y est toujours*. (SS7, 5/2: 45)

There is no poet who does not accept each and every kind of element—and therefore rebellion too. Pushkin was wary of Nikolai, deified Peter, but loved Pugachev. [...] Find me a poet with no Pugachev! with no Pretender! with no Corsican!—*inside*. A poet may just lack the strength (the means) for a Pugachev. *But the intent is always there*.

Note, again, the implications of the pretender's presence “within”: the poet is pregnant with imposture and will give birth to it in one form or another if only she (or he) has the strength. Irina Shevelenko notes Tsvetaeva's approach to maternity in poetry, which takes a position against the anti-procreative arguments of many Symbolists:

Тот акцент на материнстве как на сугубо индивидуальном (а не родовом) и творческом (а не биологическом) акте, который так характерен для ее автописаний, был, скорее всего, бессознательной (а быть может, сознательной) полемикой с этими концепциями. (Шевеленко 377)

That stress on maternity as a profoundly individual (but not genetic) and creative (but not biological) act, which is so characteristic of her self-descriptions, was more likely than not an unconscious (but perhaps a conscious) polemic with these conceptions.

Pretenders, like poems, are the poet's offspring, and the poet's “self” as created through poetry falls into a very similar category. The female poet, excluded by gender from legitimate participation in the poetic tradition,⁹ combines in her own identity and activity the mother and the love child of Tsvetaeva's poem.

Legitimacy can be signified by physical evidence, like the romantic “secret sign” in Tsvetaeva's “Мой ответ Осипу Мандельштаму” [My Answer to Osip Mandelstam], a review of Mandelstam's book *Шум времени* [The Noise of Time] not published in her lifetime. Addressing the poet who has “descended” into prose, she asks: “Чем же была твоя царственность? Тот лоскут пурпура, вольно или невольно отброшенный тобой? Или есть у тебя—где-нибудь на плече или на сердце—царственный тайный знак? [What was your tsar-quality? That scrap of purple, voluntarily or involuntarily cast aside by you? Or do you have—somewhere on your shoulder or on your heart—the royal secret sign?]

(SS7, 5/1: 305). She seeks a visible sign to prove the poet's royal descent, but her question is already ambiguous: who can see the secret sign on a heart without stopping its beating? This scepticism towards authority explains Tsvetaeva's poetic opposition to the Revolution and support for the Tsar (especially after his death), otherwise incongru-

9. This exclusion worked to bar women from the canon though it could not prevent them from writing. Nevertheless, it recalls the legal exclusion of female heirs from the throne of Russia after Pavel I's new law of succession. By barring women from the throne he managed, if only retroactively, to make his own mother look like a pretender.

ous with her fondness for pretenders.¹⁰ Her words to Mandelstam make clear that the poet is tsar (or serves the tsar) of *another* realm, whose authorities will never rule on earth.

Revolutionary Moscow presented precisely the sort of *смутное время* [time of troubles] that tends to breed pretenders, and Tsvetaeva's earlier interest in the phenomenon helped her put events and ideas of the period into historical perspective.¹¹ Her sharpened awareness of similar historical events led to two 1918 poems about André Chénier, guillotined in 1794. One begins, "Андрей Шенье взошел на эшафот. / А я живу—и это страшный грех [André Chénier stepped up on the scaffold. / But I am living—and that's a terrible sin]" (SS7, 1/2: 79–80). In revolutions and other troubled times, being a poet is deeply problematic because it could, perhaps *should*, lead to death. Anyone who survives under such circumstances, Tsvetaeva indicates, may be unworthy of the name of poet.

Several of Tsvetaeva's poems of the post-Revolutionary period mention Grishka Otrepiev, the "False Dimitry," perhaps the most famous pretender in Russian history and literature. One poem calls him "*Grishka-vor*" [Greg the thief]:¹² in a way he answers the riddle "Who is the father?": both tsar and thief. Dimitry's consort, Marina Mniszek, also effectively expresses issues of legitimacy, since she married three False Dimitrys in turn and bore one of them a child. Mniszek was always a favorite of Tsvetaeva, for their shared first name and Polish ancestry and for her outlaw reputation. Denied power in seventeenth-century society, this woman resorted to deceit and violence to improve her position. Tsvetaeva's Mniszek is the power behind the pretend throne, as Dimitry seems a dim-witted plaything in her hands (SS7, 2: 21–23). In the 1916 poem "Димитрий! Марина! В мире" [Dimitry! Marina! In the world] (SS7, 1/1: 265–67), Dimitry's mother, confined to a convent as the nun Marfa, also assumes complicity in the affair. The fourth stanza points to a mark on the pretender's body that might prove his identity as heir to the Russian throne:

Взаправду ли знак родимый	Is the birth mark
На темной твоей ланите,	On your dark cheek,
Димитрий,— все та же черная	Dimitry, really still the same
Горошинка, что у отрока	Little black pea that [your/his?]
У родного, у царевича	Mother kissed laughing
На смуглой и круглой щечке	On the swarthy and round cheek of the lad,
Смесь целовала мать? (266)	Of the dear one, the tsarevich?

10. See Tsvetaeva's poems about the White Army (in *Лебединый стан* [The Swans' Encampment], "Перекоп" ['Perekop'] and "Красный бычок" ['The Little Red Bull']), and her unfinished *poëta* on the Tsar's family (SS7, 3/2: 422–24).

11. Other factors include good acquaintance with the French Revolution and the fates of the Russian Decembrists, whose bards were Ryleev (executed) and Pushkin (absent by chance).

12. "Гришка-вор тебя не ополячил" [Grishka the thief didn't make you Polish] (in the cycle "Moskve," SS7, 1/2: 66).

Linking the mole and the imposter's status, the folk imagination whose voice the poet takes on draws a sentimental scene where a new mother caresses and memorizes her child's special features. Facing the young man now, the nun kisses him, and her recognition seals his legitimacy:

Сама инокиня	The nun herself
Признала сына!	Admitted her son!
Как же ты—для нас—не тот?	How could you—for us—not be him?

The nun's reasons for cooperating in a deception, given her involuntary confinement, can easily be imagined (Perrie 82–83). The poem ends with reference to a large candle burning for Dimitry and Marina in the Arkhangelsky Cathedral—over the grave of the murdered tsarevich Dimitry, since there is no gravesite for Grishka and Marina. Or does this placement of the candle for the dead once again make Grishka the same as Dimitry, a pretender buried elsewhere who nonetheless partakes of the tsarevich's lamblike and angelic qualities?

Tsvetaeva's exploration of pretenders leads her to interest in other poets who liked them too. Her prose names Grishka Otrepiev twice as the favorite rebel of one poet who is clearly a pretender,¹³ who is in fact forced to become a pretender by her gender. That is Elizaveta Ivanovna Dmitrieva (1887–1928), who published in 1909–10 under the pseudonym Cherubina de Gabriak. Much of what we know about Dmitrieva springs from Tsvetaeva's 1933 memoir of Maks Voloshin, "Живое о живом."¹⁴ I must therefore stress that what Tsvetaeva presents and critiques is her own version of Cherubina's story, based on Voloshin's retelling and some half-forgotten poems. The story embedded in the memoir serves at least three purposes: it memorializes the recently deceased Voloshin and his support for women poets as well as his own love of pretense, it recovers Cherubina de Gabriak from oblivion, and it sets up Tsvetaeva's resemblance to and difference from Cherubina (whose name happens to rhyme with Tsvetaeva's own lyrical creature, "Marina").

Tsvetaeva introduces Cherubina in strongly gendered terms, as "подарок мне живой героини и живого поэта, героини собственной поэмы: поэтессы Черубины де Габриак [a present to me of a living heroine and a living poet, heroine of her own poem: the poetess Cherubina de Gabriak]" (SS7, 4/1: 169). Dmitrieva's unlovely appearance means that she can develop poetically only through pretense; Tsvetaeva explains that a poet's physical body must be in harmony with her inner self, mostly in order to please the outer, ex-

13. Dmitrieva is identified by name in "Живое о живом" [A Living Word about a Living Man] (SS7, 4/1: 169–70), and mentioned without her name in "Искусство при свете совести" [Art in the Light of Conscience] (SS7, 5/2: 45).

14. Pachmuss (243–49) appears to draw much of the information in her biographical sketch of Dmitrieva from Tsvetaeva; Makovsky gives a rather different version of Cherubina's story, but he also reacts and refers to Tsvetaeva.

PLICITLY male and masculine, literary world.¹⁵ Dmitrieva, who for all her contagious love for Grishka Otrepiev is a mere “скромная школьная учительница [humble school teacher],” makes up a beautiful, Catholic, wealthy, unhappy persona, “Байрон в женском обличьи, но даже без хромоты [Byron in female aspect, but even without the limp]” (SS7, 4/1: 171). The French-cum-Italian pseudonym also frees Dmitrieva from her Russian patronymic (Ivanovna, the same as Tsvetaeva’s) and so has potential to liberate her from patriarchal literary control.¹⁶ Cherubina’s traits nonetheless recall the confining aesthetic of Romanticism and Russian Symbolism’s eternal feminines. She sends poems to the artsy Petersburg journal *Apollon*, and the men of *Apollon*, in love with her gift, handwriting, and name, publish two selections, proving Voloshin right in suggesting the imposture.

For Tsvetaeva, this persona is necessary because Dmitrieva writes out of her desire for love, and men’s love at that;¹⁷ only beauty, real or fantasized, can win men’s love. Tsvetaeva harshly criticizes the aesthetes of *Apollon* for their inability to read a woman’s words except through her face and body, their urge to find the author and see her in the flesh.¹⁸ At the same time, despite the consideration due to Dmitrieva’s tender years, Tsvetaeva is critical of her as well. Dmitrieva’s presumed desire for men’s love, though Tsvetaeva feels all young women share it, contrasts with the ability of women and great poets (or perhaps only women?) to love the passionate poetic soul even in a small, ordinary, slightly limping body. At a deeper level, Dmitrieva expresses her own desire not by writing it, but by seeking men’s desire for Cherubina, who both is and is not herself. Her story is marred by narcissism, wanting to see herself not only in the mirror on her wall and the mirror on her table (that is, her notebook; SS7, 4/1: 169–70), but in the admiring gazes of her publishers. Recalling the seventeen-year-old self who wrote to Dmitrieva, the mature Tsvetaeva describes her distaste for the response:

15. Tsvetaeva describes other women writers as “некрасивые любимицы богов [unattractive favorites of the gods]” (SS7, 4/1: 169). Her image of the simple schoolteacher “with the soul of Cherubina” (173) shows typical Romantic dualism.

16. Tsvetaeva points out the same kind of liberation in Bely’s pseudonym in “Пленный дух” [A Captive Spirit, 1934]: “Каждый литературный псевдоним прежде всего отказ от отчества, ибо отца не включает, исключает. Максим Горький, Андрей Белый—кто им отец? [Every literary pseudonym is first and foremost a rejection of the patronymic, for it doesn’t include the father, it excludes. Maksim Gorky, Andrei Bely—who is their father?]” (SS7, 4/1: 264)

17. Dale Spender (191–92) argues that men are free to write in public *or* private spheres, while women were generally barred from public writing; thus any poet who wishes to be published is in effect writing for men—Tsvetaeva as well as Cherubina. The difference is that Cherubina, created to suit men’s desires, mirrors stereotypical ideals of femininity.

18. Here Tsvetaeva throws in a dig at Pushkin, who “loved an inanimate object, Natalia Goncharova” (SS7, 4/1: 170).

Помню узкий лиловый конверт с острым почерком и сильным запахом духов, *черубинины* конверт и почерк, меня в моей рожденной простоте скорее оттолкнувшие, чем привлечшие. Ибо я-то, и трижды: как женщина, как поэт, как неэстет любила не гордую иностранку в хорах и на хорах жизни, а именно школьную учительницу Дмитриеву—с душой Черубины. Не дело-то ведь для Черубины было—не в моей любви. (SS7, 4/1: 173)

I recall a narrow lilac envelope with sharp handwriting and a strong scent of perfume, *Cherubina's* envelope and handwriting, which to me in my innate simplicity were sooner repellent than attractive. For I, and thrice: as a woman, as a poet and as a non-aesthete, loved not the proud foreigner in the choirs and on the top floors of life, but precisely the schoolteacher Dmitrieva with Cherubina's soul. But for Cherubina, of course, it was not a matter of *my* love.

Tsvetaeva distances herself from Cherubina for many reasons, despite the traits they share: rhyming names, gender, youth, preference for Romantic poetry, mentoring from Voloshin.

Dmitrieva's pose, in the context of serious literature, exceeds the bounds of acceptable poetic pretense and moves into masquerade. Svetlana Boym, in her 1991 book *Death in Quotation Marks*, uses Tsvetaeva's version of Cherubina's story as a prime example of the combination of excess and lack that characterizes the Russian cultural image of the poetess. Boym devotes one page to the story of Cherubina, whose poetic success turns out not to be success as a poet at all:

She is a beautiful dream object of male love—ideal, absent, disembodied, and almost unsexed, who as an extra activity, a pleasant extravagance or stylish eccentricity, happened to write “feminine poetry.” Woman-as-subject-of-writing was appropriated by a much more culturally accepted image, woman-as-object-of-courtly love. Hence, the poetess has been murdered by the Romantic heroine. (198)¹⁹

Boym labels Cherubina both obscene and excessive; her masquerade, like the tradition of carnival, seems subversive but in fact serves to underline rather than undermine the status quo.²⁰

Cherubina, or rather Dmitrieva, underestimates how dangerous it is for a young woman to attract the attention of anyone named Apollo, even an editorial collective. Her pretense ends, in Tsvetaeva's telling, when the staff of *Apollon* learns Cherubina's true identity:

Как лунатика—окликнули и окликом сбросили с башни ее собственного Черубининою замка—на мостовую прежнего быта, на которую разбилась вдребезги. [...] Это было конец Черубины. Больше она не писала. (SS7, 4/1: 172)

19. Given the nature of her project, Boym does not fully address either Tsvetaeva's appreciation of Cherubina's strategy or how her version of Dmitrieva's story stresses the younger poet's difference.

20. Cherubina's “carnavalesque” performance displays what Mary Russo calls the “limitations, defeats, and indifferences generated by carnival's complicitous place in dominant culture” (214).

They called to her as if to a sleepwalker, and with that call they cast her down from the tower of her own Cherubinic castle—to the pavement of [her] former everyday life, on which she shattered into fragments. [...] That was the end of Cherubina. She wrote no more.

Just as Cherubina depends on a *mélange* of extravagant traits, Tsvetaeva describes her demise in details that both describe and deny physical experience: a body that falls from a high place must be damaged, but it cannot break into shards unless it is brittle as a *mirror*. The created biography smashes apart, leaving behind a set of poems no longer bound by their author's mysterious identity. Even Tsvetaeva, writing in 1933, can recall only fragments of her verses.²¹ The pretender is undone by the powers that be—the journal *Apollon* and the men who run it and decide who shall be published, who may write for the public. They are the rulers of poetry, with power to cast Cherubina down from a castle that is not only a fairy-tale prop but also an attempt to situate and defend a kind of authority. For them, Dmitrieva's masquerade as Cherubina de Gabriak amounts to a theft of language and publication under false pretenses. The district school inspector's discovery that she has infected her history students with love for Grishka Otrepiev is also quite dangerous: the teacher could lose her job or attract the attention of the secret police. A poet is oriented against the powers that be, and for Tsvetaeva Dmitrieva is heroic in trying to deceive them.

Tsvetaeva's description of Cherubina's demise calls on the violence of society's reaction against the pretender, especially considering that Cherubina was not trying to incite violence. Her fairy-tale plummeting death may compare favorably to Grishka Otrepiev's come-uppance (outlined in “Трем самозванцам жена” [Wife to three Pretenders, 1921] (*SS7*, 2: 22): he jumps from a high place but is not so lucky as to shatter against the pavement. Rather, he is abandoned by the self-serving Mniszek, mocked and abused by the crowds who once followed him, and mutilated: “С дудкой кровавой во пры [With a bloody fife in his mouth].”²² The euphemistic description of severed genitals shows the Pretender's sexual threat defused,²³ resonating with the seductive and more successful “fife” of the Pied Piper in Tsvetaeva's 1925 long poem, “Крысолов” [Ratcatcher] (Ciepiela). The dethroned authority

21. I thank Pamela Chester for drawing my attention to this point.

22. One historian's summary of Dimitry's death (Perrie, 98–103) does not mention such a mutilation, but describes how “a boyar placed [a] mask over the pretender's genitals and stuck the chanter of a bagpipe in his mouth” (99), to make him look like a performing buffoon, or *skomorokh*.

23. The female pretender's sexual threat fuels the “*kabatskaia tsaritsa*” [tavern queen] in the 1916 poem “Кабы нас с тобой” [As You and I], a depiction of the lives of rebel pretenders (*SS7*, 1/2: 10). Though the hero and addressee seems to be Emelian Pugachev, whose charm and mastery of poetic language is described in Tsvetaeva's 1937 “Пушкин и Пугачев,” here the speaker relegates her more famous presumptive addressee to the status of “дружок” [little friend] of the “прекрасная самозванка” [splendid female pretender].

must be made to look unattractive or even ridiculous, like Dmitrieva once her true face is exposed.

Despite her critical attitude, Tsvetaeva recognizes that Dmitrieva's imposture addressed the poet's needs. It is justified first of all by its tragic ending, which makes Cherubina a sacrificial victim and Dmitrieva, by extension, a poetic rebel and mother of a slain pretender, her other "self." Moreover, the pseudonym works (briefly) as a poetic strategy, since Cherubina produces a body of poetry. Tsvetaeva asserts Dmitrieva's worth in the history of women's poetry, calling her in one place "замечательная и зря-забытая [remarkable and forgotten to no purpose]" (SS7, 5/2: 45), in another place comparing her to Akhmatova and to herself (SS7, 4/1: 173).

Tsvetaeva nonetheless distances herself from Cherubina by denying that *she* would practice such a deception; Voloshin's effort to tempt her into writing under multiple pseudonyms runs against the cliff "моей немецкой протестантской честности, губительной гордыни все, что пишу—подписывать [of my German Protestant honesty, the ruinous pride of signing everything I write]" (SS7, 4/1:175). Description of her pride as "ruinous" pride hints that even the act of signing her name is potentially dangerous, a pretense perhaps as fatal as Cherubina's. Using de Gabriak as another example of Voloshin's poetic mentoring stresses her similarities to Tsvetaeva; one could say that Tsvetaeva is willing to take Dmitrieva as an example but not Cherubina, the "False Dmitrieva." Boym stresses the poetess's "obscenity" and low status: what kind of ancestor, for a serious poet, is Cherubina de Gabriak?

So whom does the mature poet Tsvetaeva choose in exploring her role as a pretender? It is the poet most opposite to Cherubina: man rather than woman, genuine rather than sham, balanced rather than excessive, and finally, revered rather than forgotten. Aleksandr Pushkin is the main subtext of Tsvetaeva's own pretenders and pretensions, her primary model for how to *be* a poet.²⁴ Pushkin's treatment of Grishka Otrepiev and Marina Mniszek in *Boris Godunov* helps form Tsvetaeva's poetic exploration of Moscow. Napoleon and other cultural figures appear through the lens of Pushkin's poetry, as does the dilemma of the poet's role vis-à-vis worldly power and the mindless manipulability of "the mob." Tsvetaeva finds sources of conflict and rebellion in Pushkin's biography, foregrounding his Protean character and mixed family heritage, old Russian aristocracy with African/Petrine parvenu.²⁵ Tsvetaeva claims, "Пушкину я обязана своей страстью к мятежникам—как бы они не назывались и не одевались [I owe to Pushkin my passion for rebels, however they might be named and clothed]" (SS7, 5/2: 188). Pushkin's treatment of historical figures such as Emelian Pugachev and Napoleon underlines

24. On Tsvetaeva's relationship with Pushkin, see Scotto, Smith, Knapp. Pushkin also creates female characters who defy patriarchal codes of behavior, such as Mniszek, or Mariula and Zemfira in "Цыганы" [The Gypsies].

25. See in particular "Наталья Гончарова" (SS7, 4/1: 84–85).

significant questions about poetic legitimacy in his own work, and for Tsvetaeva this links him with Dmitrieva.²⁶

Tsvetaeva's most important study of Pushkin's treatment of pretenders is the analysis in her 1937 article "Пушкин и Пугачев" [Pushkin and Pugachev]. The poet's love of rebels and urge to remake reality act to oppose Nikolai I, the "bad father" tsar. Tsvetaeva's reading is based in the lasting attraction she feels for Pugachev (which she insists all children share); she credits Pugachev with introducing her to the phenomenon of "иносказательная речь" [allegorical speech] (SS7, 5/2: 177), which is, after all, a thing close to poetry. Michael Finke has shown that Pushkin makes both Grishka Otrepiev and Pugachev into poets (187). For Tsvetaeva the representative of legitimate power in *The Captain's Daughter*, Ekaterina II, is at a disadvantage given her challenger's linguistic creativity.²⁷ Tsvetaeva argues that the persona of Grinëv, once he becomes a poet in defiance of all verisimilitude, lets Pushkin enter a relationship with the dangerous pretender who has so many of the gifts of a poet, hinting that Pushkin seeks not only a Tsar he could love and respect, but also powerful poetic ancestors.²⁸ Her focus on Pugachev (SS7, 5/2: 190) makes sense, since she reads *The Captain's Daughter* as a revelation of a poet's desires and creative growth. For her the transformation of the repulsive historical Pugachev of *История Пугачевского бунта* [History of the Pugachev Rebellion] into the fascinating "Вожатый" [Guide] distinguishes Pushkin the poet, who wrote the novel, from Pushkin the prose-writer, who produced the historical study.

Elsewhere in her prose, Tsvetaeva reads Pushkin, her "first poet," in tight connection with questions of legitimacy and the relation of naming to temporal power. She inherits the poet from her mother early in life, as if in recompense for the name Aleksandr, which her mother planned to give to her first child but could not when she had a daughter rather than a son.²⁹ The phrase

26. The paragraph cited earlier in abbreviated form segues from Pushkin to Dmitrieva: "Пушкин Николая опасался, Петра боготворил, а Пугачева—любил. Недаром все ученики одной замечательной и зря-забытой поэтессы, одновременно преподавательницы истории [...] [Pushkin was wary of Nikolai, deified Peter—and loved Pugachev. Not for nothing did all the pupils of one remarkable and vainly forgotten poetess, at the same time a history teacher [...]]" "Искусство при свете совести" (SS7, 5/2: 45).

27. Against Pugachev's resonant speech and use of proverbs, Stephanie Sandler points to Catherine's "silence," which links her to Pushkin's wife, Natalia Nikolaevna Goncharova. The very name "Catherine," Sandler shows, is problematic: "The title Catherine II signifies solely the power of the state; given the preference that Puškin and Cvetaeva shared for pretenders over legitimate rulers, her power cannot but be false" (146).

28. Besides stressing Grinëv and Pugachev's son/(step-)father relationship and Pugachev's blackness (see Pushkin's association with blackness in "Moi Pushkin"), Tsvetaeva points out that Pugachev in age could have been Pushkin's father (SS7, 5/2: 190).

29. One of many references to her mother's plan to name a son Aleksandr opens "Мать и музыка" [Mother and Music] (SS7, 5/1: 10). Thus the memoir opens and begins her life story with her mother's disappointment.

“first poet” leads to the statement that her first poet was killed (*SS7*, 5/1: 58). In a way, Tsvetaeva’s poetic gift emerges from Pushkin’s death, which demands that she remedy his loss with her own writing and frees space for her, even as it threatens her with a similar fate. The poet’s death, depicted in her mother’s bedroom, shadows the words the poet wrote in a way that recalls Biblical texts.³⁰ Tsvetaeva’s view of Nicholas I’s complicity in his death puts Pushkin in the position of his Pugachev, killed by Catherine after his failed rebellion. Thus, Pushkin’s death, in a way, foreshadows Cherubina’s fall and fragmentation. Pushkin’s death and Pugachev’s execution suggest that the poet, sharing the fate of the pretender, is one himself.

Pushkin is in fact both authority and pretender, both Tsar and thief, though much of Tsvetaeva’s later writing about him foregrounds the thief, challenging his installation as the ultimate stultifying poetic authority of the emigration.³¹ At the same time, Tsvetaeva reads Pushkin’s death through his own poetry to insist that he was a victim of envy from anyone and everyone who could not write poetry (*SS7*, 5/1: 57); thus this exemplary poet was a Romantic sacrifice of both autocracy and society at large. The true authority of Pushkin and his poetry is distinct from the pseudo-authority the mob assigns to him; neither Pushkin nor Tsvetaeva recognize any legitimacy in the mob’s judgment.

Killed for his insistence on being himself (that is, a poet), Pushkin is a sacrificial figure, and his passion and posthumous growth into a national treasure resonate with sainthood, modelled on Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.³² The sacrifice of a poet who seems like a pretender but turns out after death to be the real thing shifts from masquerade to passion, from carnival to sacrifice. Thus the great genius Pushkin’s duel and death recuperate Cherubina, or at least Dmitrieva, and Tsvetaeva as well. Women who write poetry may perish because they take themselves too seriously, but this is tragic rather than funny. The value of their careers depends on the other body, their poems, after the embarrassing, excessively gendered (in Boym’s terms) female body has left the scene.

What power, then, does the poet want? Let us look again at the unlikely pair, Dmitrieva and Pushkin. Both study history as well as writing poetry:³³ Pushkin writes a study of the Pugachev rebellion in the imperial archives,

30. Tsvetaeva makes the parallel explicit in her 1928 “Наталья Гончарова,” arguing that Pushkin had to be killed, “Дабы сбылись писания [so the writings/scriptures would come to pass]” (*SS7*, 4/1: 87).

31. See her assertion in the 1931 poem “Вся его наука” [All his science] (*SS7*, 2: 187): “—Пушкиным не бейте! / Ибо бью вас—им! [Don’t beat me with Pushkin! For I beat you with him!]” (*SS7*, 2: 286–87).

32. The latter possibility echoes in Tsvetaeva’s treatment of Blok, who shares with Pushkin the numinous name Aleksandr.

33. A shared interest in history underlies Tsvetaeva’s discovery of its poetic elements in Dmitry Plovaisky’s textbook, which she describes without specifying which of his several books she read, in “Дом у старого Пимена” [The House at Old Pimen, 1932] (*SS7*, 5/1: 109).

while the schoolteacher Dmitrieva, in a lowlier position, fills the children in her history class with love for Grishka Otrepiev. Just as Pushkin makes the child Tsvetaeva love Pugachev, Dmitrieva offers her pupils a version of history that is far from the dominant state ideology. Tsvetaeva makes clear that it is not historical fact (or the fact of official histories, censored by the authorities)³⁴ that makes such pretenders as Pugachev and Grishka Otrepiev attractive; it is the poets, imaginers of alternate realities. By questioning the narratives of those in power, poets already foment a kind of revolution and offer threatening alternatives. The bloody executions of Pugachev and Otrepiev (and even of Pushkin) remind the reader that political authority rests on violence. Cherubina's fatal fall and Tsvetaeva's sometimes exaggerated presentation of her own sufferings reach back to the bloody deaths of Pushkin and André Chénier.

The question of legitimacy illuminates the role of gender in Tsvetaeva's poetry. She makes clear, in the story created in her autobiographical prose, that the desired and expected son Aleksandr still loomed over the daughter Marina long after her mother's death.³⁵ This fuels concerns about her own legitimacy as a poet: her "predestination" as a poet is both proven and denied by the name Aleksandr, which is and is not hers (due, she insists, solely to her sex). Thus the name both links her to and separates her from the "real" poets Aleksandr Pushkin and Aleksandr Blok. How can a woman in such a patriarchal society be a poet? Furthermore, how can the self she creates in her poetry be legitimate? It is worth noting that H el ene Cixous, reading "Мой Пушкин," describes Tsvetaeva's choice of poetic ancestry as a birth "from the woman womb of Pushkin," equating the belly where he was shot with a womb. For Cixous the fatal shot, piercing Pushkin's abdomen, feminizes him and thus makes him available to Tsvetaeva.³⁶

Tsvetaeva's autobiographical prose advances the Romantic idea that each poet (even before the death of his or her mother) is an orphan, illegitimate, a

34. The censorship Dmitrieva ignores in her teaching recalls the censorship later authorities imposed on Pushkin's work. Tsvetaeva describes the "хрестоматия" [school anthology] version of his works as "обезвреженный, прирученный [rendered harmless, tamed]" ("Мой Пушкин," *SS7*, 5/1: 73), and indignantly recalls the falsified quotation still on his statue in Moscow in 1926, "Несмытый и несмыаемый позор [An uneffaced and ineffaceable disgrace]." "Поэт о критике" [The Poet on the Critic/Criticism] (*SS7*, 5/1: 290fn).

35. Aleksandr haunted Tsvetaeva at least until 1934, when she wrote to Yury Ivask, "с самого замысла матери, хотевшей, решившей сына Аександра (оттого я вышла поэт, а не поэтесса...) [from the very plan of my mother, who wanted, had decided on a son Aleksandr (that's why I turned out a poet, not a poetess)]" (Tsvetaeva 1956, 220), though she may have chosen to emphasize this in order to stress her natural sympathy with Ivask.

36. Cixous bases her claim on the assumption that Russian, like French, also uses the word for 'stomach' or 'belly' (*ventre*) to mean 'womb' (Cixous 16–17). One might argue that Cixous sees "zhivot," with its root "zhiv-," taking on the connotation of the source of life, or else reads the abdomen as feminized once pierced by a bullet (subjected to violent penetration). Martyrdom is once again connected with the female gender, and poetic ancestry with reproduction.

foundling, and a rebel. Her autobiographical writing depicts a family circle where Musya is a lonely, unloved child; the lack of support at home for her poetic ambitions frees her to choose her own ancestors, but for the “Devil’s orphan” this too may be a pretense. Her relation to her female biological forebears, especially her mother, is as fraught as her relation to Pushkin.

Tsvetaeva is aware that a woman who uses language for her own purposes, competing with the ultimate authority of God rather than mutely bearing his Word, is asking for martyrdom. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write, “It appears that the woman poet must in some sense become her own heroine, and that in enacting the diabolical role of witch or wise woman she literally or figuratively risks a melodramatic death at the crossroads of tradition and genre, society and art” (1984, xx). Defending her seriousness against trivialization of the “poetess” (Boym 192–200), Tsvetaeva’s theoretical writings trace a fine line between Cherubinic play-acting and Napoleonic or Pugachevian submersion in the elements. Like Pushkin, in her reading of “Пир во время чумы” [Feast in the Time of the Plague], she must escape or at least postpone elemental destruction by writing songs about it.

Peter Scotto has pointed out that Tsvetaeva “hijacks” Pushkin’s biography in order to identify herself more closely with him and to acquire something of his stature (214). This process is ambiguous, like the poem “Каждый стих — дитя любви.” On one hand, Tsvetaeva wants the stamp or “secret sign” of authority of being Pushkin’s true heir. On the other hand, her evocations of Pushkin constantly work against the oppressive authority he was granted by political and cultural powers, be they tsarist, Soviet, or émigré, who appropriated him to support their own agenda. The result is quintessentially Tsvetaevan: she claims legitimacy as heir of the greatest Russian poet but often exempts him from the same game of power and legitimacy. In her view he is neither authority nor follower, neither tsar nor member of the mob. But is she really like Pushkin, or is this the ultimate hubris and pretense? It is, in fact, the dilemma of a woman poet in a male-defined tradition, and Tsvetaeva addresses it not by slavishly adapting to fashion in hope of attracting male approval, as did Cherubina, but rather by loosing her creative energies on Pushkin’s biography and work. She both illustrates the legitimizing influence of Pushkin on her own life and writing and seeks to mediate readings of his work, to influence his image in the present, perhaps to give birth to poems inspired by him.

Although Tsvetaeva’s relationship to Pushkin and his works is not unique,³⁷ it does suggest a particularly gendered attitude towards the Russian poetic tradition. Her “creative misreadings” of Pushkin’s work recall the generational conflict between writers and their predecessors treated in Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence*. Indeed, Tsvetaeva’s concern with her reputation and se-

37. Other examples of unorthodox approaches to Pushkin appear in Vladimir Maiakovsky’s 1924 poem “Юбилейное” [Jubilee] and Daniil Kharms’s “Анекдоты из жизни Пушкина” [Anecdotes from the Life of Pushkin].

riousness as a poet, expressed in referring to herself as “поэт” rather than as “поэтресса,” means that her attitude towards her male predecessors, as well as male and female contemporaries, is much more like what Bloom describes than is typical of women authors of her time.³⁸ As Alyssa Dinega writes, “Tsvetaeva [...] is engaged in a contest of competing mythologies—a subtle battle to stake out her own poetic domain. She [...] does, genuinely, love and admire the poets she addresses, yet at the same time she must overcome the psychological barrier of their greatness that threatens to silence her own gift” (Dinega 38). Tsvetaeva’s prose treatment of Pushkin, however, shows not anxiety about his influence on her, but rather concern that others might overlook or deny this influence.

By making Pushkin a pretender, Tsvetaeva partially endows one source of the Russian poetic tradition with traits that western culture has coded as feminine, making him more available as a model for a woman poet. Just as her descriptions of the poetic process spring from metaphors of women’s “natural” reproductive role, where a verse can be described as a love child, her vision of the poet’s place in society generalizes the unstable and marginal position of the female poet, endangered by her gender, to all poets. Her combination of Romantic tradition and strategic use of biological essentialism seeks a place within the ranks of real, serious poets. Tsvetaeva sets up varieties of legitimacy that challenge political orthodoxy and draw strength from already containing instability, identifying with both tsar and thief. She insists on a definition of poets that highlights their essential otherness, and her poetic pretenders emerge as the only true bearers of authority.

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38. See Gilbert and Gubar 1984, 3–44, on “anxiety of authorship” among nineteenth-century women writing in English.

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Абстракт

Сибелан Форрестер

Поэт-Самозванка и разработка поэтической законности у М.И. Цветаевой

В статье рассматривается вопрос о поэтической законности в творчестве М.И. Цветаевой. Черубина де Габриак (псевдоним Е.И. Дмитриевой) служит примером женщины, наказанной (разоблачением и фигуративной казнью) за литературное самозванчество, но Цветаева ее потаенно связывает с самым выдающимся русским поэтом А.С. Пушкиным. Игра политических последствий цветаевского отношения к этим поэтам и ее собственной любви к самозванчеству многое объясняет в поэтике и в художественном отношении к гендеру у Цветаевой.