But this is a quibble with a book that every student of Russian modernism and of theories of nationhood should read. Shevelenko has brilliantly succeeded in revealing the rich and vibrant life of ideas and public discourse centered on nationalism and aesthetics in late imperial and pre-revolutionary Russia.

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Isaac Babel: The Essential Fictions. Ed. and trans. Val Vinokur. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018. xviii, 404 pp. Notes. Bibliography. $21.95, paper.

Judgment: A Novel. By David Bergelson. Trans. Harriet Murav and Sasha Senderovich. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017. xxxvii, 222 pp. Notes. $18.95, paper.

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The lives of David Bergelson (1884–1952) and Isaak Babel′ (1894–1940) had a good deal in common. Both grew up in middle-class Jewish families in the part of the Russian Empire which is Ukraine today, received a traditional Jewish education but later chose a career as secular writers; both spent some time abroad after the October Revolution but eventually decided to come back to the Soviet Union, where they enjoyed privileged lifestyles as prominent Soviet writers in Moscow. In the end, both perished in Stalinist purges, paying with their lives for that privilege. They must have met in person, and Babel′ translated one of Bergelson's stories into Russian. Both writers are deservedly celebrated as daring innovators and meticulous stylists in Yiddish and Russian, respectively. And yet their prose styles are radically different. Babel′'s is straightforward, forceful and clear, reflecting his fascination with his larger-than-life masculine characters and their exploits, be it Jewish gangsters or Red Cavalry Cossacks. Bergelson's is opaque, blurry, and overloaded with heavy syntax. His favorite characters are indecisive, passive, and often depressed men and women. Babel′ was praised and reproved for his daring use of the rough Russian-Jewish Odessa speech which breaks the conventions of Russian literary style. Bergelson avoids Yiddish loquacity, making a very deliberate break with the tradition of his illustrious older contemporary Sholem Aleichem. Indeed, Babel′'s Russian has more in common with Sholem Aleichem's Yiddish (whom Babel′ admired and translated), than Bergelson's highly stylized Yiddish with its added flavors from Gustave Flaubert, Ivan Turgenev, Knut Hamsun, and Anton Chekhov.

While Babel's zesty prose has long been popular among western critics and readers who were rarely bothered by the ethical complacency inherent in his charming narratives, Bergelson's novel *Midas-hadin* was largely dismissed as a piece of communist propaganda unworthy of serious attention, let alone translation. But the novel was not a product of ideological pressure. Bergelson wrote it while he was still living in Berlin and not planning yet to come back to the Soviet Union. He believed in the future of Yiddish culture and Jewish life in the Soviet Union, but his sympathy was not reciprocated by communist Yiddish critics who did not consider him Soviet enough. Without denying the novel's obvious political bias, Harriet Murav and Sasha Senderovich invite us to read it first and foremost as a piece of literature "within the broader set of literary paradigms generally accorded to works of fiction" (xxiv). One of these paradigms is alluded to already in the novel's title as a reference to a complex mystical concept in Judaism which can be approximately translated as "aspect" or "measure" of judgment. The choice of *Judgment* as the English title suggests allusions

to Franz Kafka's works, as the translators explain. The action of the novel takes place in a nondescript location at the newly established Soviet-Polish border, probably somewhere in Bergelson's native Volhynia. The main hero, Filipov, is a non-Jewish worker turned commander of a small Red Army regiment in charge of stopping the smuggling of people and goods across the border. This lucrative but risky business is the main source of income for Jews in the nearby shtetl. Agitated by an underground band of Socialist Revolutionaries, who are portrayed as the main enemy of the Bolshevik revolution, local Jews actively resist Red Army attempts to impose the new order.

The geographic location in *Judgment* is the same as in Babel′'s *Red Cavalry*, which is set in the midst of the Soviet-Polish war in the summer of 1920. Like Bergelson, Babel′ is fascinated by the revolutionary fighters, but his flamboyant and unruly Cossack characters have nothing in common with the sick and emaciated Bolshevik Filipov, who is portrayed as a Jesus-like prophet/priest of the Revolution. With all the moral ambiguity of his first-person narrator masking his Jewishness, Babel′ has more compassion than Bergelson for the suffering of poor Volhynian Jews. Bergelson's narrator is semi-omniscient, dispassionate but somewhat ironic, capable of occasionally penetrating the characters' subjectivity but more often withdrawn in his own consciousness. He observes reality from a transcendental perspective, carefully depicting a rather insignificant local episode as part of the grand scheme of universal restructuring after the revolutionary cataclysm. Bergelson's assertively secular vision of the revolution is permeated by the metaphorical imagery derived from the Jewish mystical tradition which he absorbed growing up in a deeply Hasidic environment. Human emotions have no place in the new Manichean "world of nightmarish, unrelenting punishment" (xxvii) where one must choose sides but even the right choice does not guarantee individual salvation.

Both authors draw on the rich multilingual inherentance in Russian and Yiddish, but they do it in different ways. Whereas Babel′ ingeniously integrates elements of Yiddish syntax and idioms into his Russian to add expressive power and authenticity to his characters' speech, Bergelson often renders the Russian and Ukrainian speech of his characters into a deliberately inauthentic Yiddish. His "use of acoustics produces a cacophony of conflicting sounds, emphasizing the disturbing nature of the world ruled by Filipov" (xxviii). While Babel′'s language is playful, memorable, highly readable, and aesthetically pleasing, Bergelson's style is artificially heavy, opaque and often confusing, demanding a great deal of effort on the part of the reader.

Both writers are difficult to translate, but the challenges they present are different. With Babel′, the challenge is to convey the peculiar idiomatic quality of his prose without making it sound too much like Hemingway. The translator also has to watch out not to fall into many linguistic traps that are cunningly set by the author. As Val Vinokur explains in the preface, his translation grew out of the project to revise the 1955 translation by Walter Morison. His three-way conversation with Babel′ and the previous translators results in an artistically convincing attempt to impersonate Babel′'s narrator by catching the sound, rhythm, and flow of his prose. Vinokur also takes particular care to avoid misreadings and correct the errors of his predecessors, and he complements his flowing rendition of his selection of Babel′'s "essential works" with very useful endnotes. With Bergelson, the challenge is not to make his prose too easy and transparent, to preserve the puzzling complexity of his syntax and the opaqueness of his imagery, but not to leave the reader hopelessly lost among m-dashes and ellipses, a task that Murav and Senderovich have accomplished very competently. By simultaneously publishing these two books, Northwestern University

Press has brought two major modernist writers of the past century into an imaginary conversation in English, across the language barrier.

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Twentieth-Century Russian Poetry: Reinventing the Canon. Ed. Katharine Hodgson, Joanne Shelton, and Alexandra Smith. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2017. x, 499 pp. Bibliography. Index. £36.95, hard bound, £29.95 paper.
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The place of poetry has shifted in Russian culture over the past three decades. Much of its centrality and visibility has waned. Despite the fact that there exists a burgeoning poetry scene, its audience has greatly diminished and become much more specialized. At the same time, the historic Russian relationship between poetry and politics is still in effect: the state remains in control of school curricula and the institution of poetic canon that comes along with it. The excellent new volume, *Twentieth-Century Russian Poetry: Reinventing the Canon*, analyzes the transformation of the poetic canon, its idea and content, since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It presents a comprehensive and intricate overview of the canon formation and deformation from a variety of perspectives: sociological, political, historical, and literary. The volume succeeds in this project and greatly enhances our understanding of the history of Russian poetry from the end of the twentieth century until today.

As the editors clearly state at the outset of their introduction, "The aim of this collection is to investigate the state of the Russian twentieth-century poetic canon in the context of socio-political changes triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991" (1). Their main theoretical framework is Iurii Lotman's notion of "catastrophic evolutionary patterns" (10) in Russian culture, which give rise to a reconfigured relationship with the past, either nostalgic or revisionist. The notion of memory as a cultural mechanism is prioritized here and leads to the collection's main bold premise regarding the reinvention of the canon: "notions of constructing a poetic canon around the cult of Pushkin as supreme national poet appear to be rapidly crumbling away, and are being replaced by multiple coexisting canonical traditions" (41). This redirection sheds a new light on the relationship between "official" and "unofficial" canons and the perennial Russian problem of literature's relationship with state power.

Fittingly for a study of the canon, the volume's chapters are centered on individual poets and their inclusion in and reception within the canon(s). While not arranged chronologically, they form a mythological and theoretical dialogue. Not accidentally, the starting point is Joseph Brodsky, whose oeuvre and figure stand as a permanent fixture within post-Soviet culture. As Aaron Hodgson demonstrates, the canonization of Brodsky is owed equally to both "literary and extra-literary factors" (62), which means that "Brodsky can be situated in several coexisting canons: popular culture, world literature, Russian twentieth-century poetry, Russian émigré literature and prison writing" (62). This eclecticism raises the question of the misappropriation and misreading of Brodsky's legacy, a problem Brodsky himself was acutely aware of.

Alexandra Harrington turns to Brodsky's mentor, Anna Akhmatova, and analyzes the similar dynamics in the re-envisioning and popularizing of her legacy. Harrington dissects both the sanctification and denigration of Akhmatova, the latter exemplified by Alexander Zholkovsky's discovery of "the Stalinist key of Akhmatova's behavior" (89). It's improbable that there ever will be a dethroning of Akhmatova as a cultural saint and yet her case illustrates well the perilousness and dynamism of canon formation.