

AATSEEL

2018 Annual Conference Washington, DC

February, 1-4, 2018

Stream 4A: Russian-Language Poetry in Transition

Organizers:

Stephanie Sandler (Harvard, USA); Henrieke Stahl (Trier University, Germany)

Poetry has experienced unexpected popularity and a surge in productivity since the end of the 20th century. People of all social groups, age groups, languages, and cultures are not only reading poetry but also writing it. By taking advantage of new possibilities in media and communication, Russian-language poetry has spread across a transnational field, engaging other languages and nationally defined literatures. The borders of genres and its functions are being transformed in a remarkable way. Caused by the challenges of Perestroika on the one hand and by the postmillennial digital means of communication as well as social and political conditions on the other, the complexity of contemporary Russian-language poetry requires a rethinking of theoretical and methodological tools. The proposed stream investigates this research area, spanning a period from the beginning of the Perestroika (1985) to the present. The *guiding question is transition*, a key feature of contemporary poetry, in its multiple forms and functions. In contemporary poetry, transition refers specifically to three types of boundary, corresponding to three panels of the stream: boundaries between *genres*, *cultures*, and *media*. Each of these three terms will set the terms for one of our three panels, and we hope for interaction among the terms across the three panels.

Friday, February 2, 8-10 a.m.

Session 1-4: Stream 4A:

Russian-Language Poetry in Transition (I): Media and Society in Transition

Location: Penn Quarter A

Organizer: Program Committee

Chair: Stephanie Sandler, Harvard University

GROUP PANELISTS:

Panelist: Marijeta Bozovic, Yale University

Title: *Dmitry Golyenko: Poetry as Monstrosity*

This paper examines the work of poet-theorist Dmitry Golyenko, to explore experimental poetry as a form of both contemporary art practice and critical theory. Golyenko's long combinatorial poems and polemical essays circle around attempts to forge new subjectivities and collectivities through aesthetic practice. One of Golyenko's most imaginative and provocative recent essays is a piece entitled "Democracy and the Monster: Several Theses about Visual Monstrosity," for the 2005-C2007 issue of the *Moscow Art Journal*. Drawing on many sources, Golyenko comes up with a reading of what he terms "cultural monstrosity." The monster constitutes the boundaries of the possible and permissible, awakening desire alongside fear. In new forms of both art and

criticism, the monstrous *is* the political -- which is represented not as visible and obvious, but hidden and unknown. Poetic praxis offers one way to glimpse what lurks beyond the boundaries.

Panelist: Ilya Kukulkin, National Research University - Higher School of Economics, Moscow

Title: 2010s' Generation in Contemporary Russian Poetry: Between Social Activism and Subversion of Imagination

In 2015-2017, some young poets who made their debuts in the previous years, demonstrated distinct characteristics of a new cultural generation. One of this generation's most important aesthetic traits is a combination of sophisticated abstract language depicting primarily intangible psychological states, and rhetoric of political activism or at least of personal emancipation. The other possible way of action for these authors is writing long narrative poems that critically interpret experience of socialization as traumatic and one that needed to be "repaired". This paper is aimed at clarification of the aesthetic and social-cultural specificity of this emerging "newest" wave in contemporary Russian poetry.

Panelist: Jacob Edmond, University of Otago

Title: *Repetition in Transition: The Samizdat Principle of Russian Digital Poetics*

This paper argues that the strategies in recent Russian poetry that seem most overtly to respond to the rise of the Internet and digital technologies actually derive in part from what I term the *samizdat principle*, a mode of writing that developed in and through the technologies of typewriter and carbon paper and the culture of late-Soviet unofficial art and literature.

The samizdat principle merged artistic production and reproduction, writing and reading. It furnished Russian conceptual artists and poets like Dmitrii Prigov, Lev Rubinshtein, Aleksandr Iulikov, and Iurii Al'bert with the means to stress improvisation and individuality within systematic acts of copying. These artists and writers used samizdat to respond to the cultural authority of Western art and to the ideological systems of official and unofficial late Soviet culture. They also anticipated the iterative turn that accompanied the upheaval in media and political authority after the end of the Cold War.

Russian poets of the 2000s have drawn on the samizdat principle in exploiting the newfound ease of copying and in filtering the confusing diversity of the Internet's voices from Kirill Medvedev's "Tekst, posviashchennyi tragicheskimi sobytiiami 11 sentiabria v N'iu-lorke" and Stanislav L'vovskii's "Chuzhimi slovami" to Anton Ochirov's "Izrail" and the multimedia work of Roman Osminkin. These and other poets have extended samizdat's merger of artistic production and reproduction, writing and reading. In their hands, the samizdat principle of improvisation and individuality within systematic acts of copying becomes a tool to address the new media and authoritarianism of the new millennium.

Panelist: Dirk Uffelmann, University of Passau

Title: *Poetry vs. iRhetoric: Boris Khersonskii's Facebook*

Since 2010 the Odesa-based Russian-language poet Boris Khersonskii (b. 1950) has been blogging on Facebook. The proposed paper investigates the genre tensions in his circum-literary performance on the web. His blog mixes traditional poetry (often the

poems are abridged in contrast to the later offline publication) with what this paper proposes to call iRhetoric, the online performance of the writer's public, political, and (seemingly) private self. The author demonstrates the way in which Khersonskii uses the multimodal opportunities of the social network site in combining scriptural and pictorial elements, including for example the internet meme of kittens for promoting offline reading—not least of his own monomodal poetry. The observations made on Khersonskii's digital poetry and iRhetoric allow general conclusions for the circum-literary framing of poetry in the ongoing media transition.

Friday, February 2, 10:15am-12:00pm

**Session 2-4: Stream 4A:
Russian-Language Poetry in Transition (II): Poetics in Transition**

Location: Penn Quarter A

Organizer: Program Committee

Chair: Stephanie Sandler, Harvard University

GROUP PANELISTS:

Panelist: Henrieke Stahl-Schwaetzer, Universität Trier

Title: *Typology of Subject in Contemporary Russian Poetry*

Recent theory of lyric shows no special interest in the subject, because it is no longer considered a basic generic parameter of lyric poetry. Nevertheless, the subject has resurfaced in contemporary Russian lyric poetry in a wide range of new and complex forms. This article suggests a multilevel model for a typology of the subject in contemporary lyric poetry with a basis in transcendental philosophy and illustrates its validity via the poems of Elena Shvarts, Alexander Ulanov, Olga Sedakova and others.

Panelist: Mikhail Pavlovets

Title: *Экспериментальная "метапоэтология" в поисках новых форм современной русскоязычной поэзии*

Традиционно новые явления в поэзии становятся предметом научной рефлексии и обновляют поэтологическую теорию и стиховедческие концепции. Но сегодня можно встретиться с обратным процессом: современная поэзия рефлектирует над существующими теориями и концепциями, подвергая их критике или предлагая новые формы, не всегда описывающиеся в рамках традиционной методологии. Примеры таких "метапоэтологических" произведений можно найти в творчестве ряда авторов, например Льва Лосева, Сергея Бирюкова, Дарьи Суховой и др.

Panelist: Eva Rottmann, Konstanz University

Title: *Maria Stepanova's Songs of Love and Love Lost: A Reading of '20 sonetov k M*

The contemporary Russian poet Maria Stepanova creates a poetic realm in her '20 sonetov to M' (2001) that transforms Joseph Brodsky's 'Twenty sonnets to Marii Stuart' (1974) to a highly innovative poetic text with regard to the sonnet tradition. Taking up the traditional themes of the sonnet -- love and mourning lost love and life -- Stepanova adds a multitude of new links both within the context of the book of poetry 'Pesni severnykh juzhan' (2001) and to Russian and German poetry. Adopting Brodskii's title, Stepanova reduces the referent and subject, Mary Stuart, to a capital 'M', which opens a

variety of referents including mama, a mouse and one of the lyrical 'I's, Maria Stepanova.

This reading of Stepanova's 'sonnets' will focus on three specific ways in which Stepanova transcends boundaries: her cast of characters including animals and supernatural figures, the usage of the internal dialectic of the 'sonnet' between octave and sextet and the inclusion of another language and alphabet. Three comparative close analyses will demonstrate how Stepanova forms a literary space that supercedes national boundaries and extends the generic boundaries of the sonnet.

Intertexts include references to Goethe's 'Erlkönig', Lermontov's 'Beleet parus odinokii' (A Sail glistens white), Majakovsky's love declaration to Maria in *Oblako v shtanach* (A cloud in trousers) and Pushkin's 'Exegi Monumentum'.

The closure summarizes Stepanova's linguistically and intertextually highly original contribution to the sonnet tradition of mourning a beloved across cultures, times and realms, extending Elena Fanailova's understanding of the 'sonnets' as 'ruins' (Fanailova, 2001).

February 2, 1:30-3:30pm

Session 3-4: Stream 4A:

Russian-Language Poetry in Transition (III): Signifying and Resisting Transition

Location: Penn Quarter A

Organizer: Program Committee

Chair: Henrieke Stahl-Schwaetzer, Universität Trier

GROUP PANELISTS:

Panelist: Thomas Epstein, Boston College - A&S Honors

Title: Resisting Poetry: the Case of Alexander Skidan

This paper proposes to explore the poetic project of Alexander Skidan (b. 1965), using his 1995 poem Пирсинг нижней губы as its guiding text. A radical critic of the lyrical subject as center of poetic expression, Skidan in the 1990s is equally skeptical about the adequacy of any conceptual system to center poetry, since "the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere" (Pascal). Пирсинг is thus an experiment in atopia. Rooted-uprooted in the unconscious of language, Пирсинг is relatively long for Skidan (more than 200 lines), written largely «in a single sitting» (as he tells us), then morphing into 2000 more words of prose, written 'after' – prose that both reflects upon the preceding verse and turns the 'poem-prose' into an exploration of the poetic act itself and its relation to the metaphysical concept of presence, to the poet's biography, and to the body of language (here associated with the lips). Пирсинг is a work not so much fragmentary as «torn» (рванный) from that body. Polyphonic and dissonant, the poem is permeated by otherness: the English language, the European and American modernist traditions, cinema, travel, and especially eros (sex). Ground-breaking and transgressive in form and content, Пирсинг crosses boundaries of genre, explodes the lyric subject without devolving into collage, and replaces the unknowable God with the equally unknowable (bleeding) body. From this foundation I propose to extend my discussion to some of the intellectual and poetic sources of Skidan's project (especially Surrealism and Bataille, Alexander Vvedensky and Arkady Dragomoshchenko, and the American avant-garde tradition, much of it implicitly revealed in his formidable body of essayistic writing), and to suggest how Skidan's poetry of the 90s lays the groundwork for his more politically explicit and aesthetically ascetic work of the 2000s and 2010s.

Panelist: Rainer Grübel, University of Oldenburg

Title: *Poetry as dream and dreams in the poetry of Gennadij Ajgi*

The paper considers on the one hand the poetry of the Russian poet Gennadij Ajgi as a kind of dream, and studies on the other the dreams in his poetry. The idea that Ajgi conceives poetry generally as dream can be grounded on certain observations by this poet and author of performances about poetical texts and performative acts.

After a short discussion of the history of philosophical and psychological models of the dream, which gives value to possibility and the concept of something beyond reality, and a consideration of Vittore Carpaccio's painting „Dream of the Holy a“ („Il sogno di sant'Orsola“ 1495) the paper takes its textual starting point from a canonical text of Russian dream-literature, from the Lermontov's poem „Son“ (A Dream, 1841) and its deconstruction by Dmitrij Prigov's poem „V doline Dagestana“ („In a Valley of Dagestan“) more than a century later. Whereas the postmodernist Prigov creates the dream of a dream, that is a dream of the second order, which opposes a world of consciousness with a world of unconsciousness, Ajgi tends to eliminate the world of consciousness and its logics. The paper pays attention to the early booklet *Son-i-poezija* (Dream-and-poetry), which already in its graphic presentation suggests the equivalence between dream and poetry but also introduces the idea of an archive of dream-motifs and sound-patterns, corresponding to their elements.

The analysis of representative examples of Ajgi's poems, explicitly containing dreams, is followed by a reflection on the question of the function of Ajgi's dream-poetry in relation to the tradition of Socialist realism and its concept of reality, which is related to a certain model of society and which conceives literature as a mirror of this reality. The reception of Ajgi's poetry by young Russian poets shows that his poems and its poetics played an important role in the period of transition from Soviet literature to its more modern post-Soviet equivalent.

Panelist: Nataliya Karageorgos, Graduate Center CUNY

Title: *From Seraphim to Signifiers: Arkadii Dragomoshchenko's Metapoetic Gestures in 1985*

1985 was the year of transition in the career of one of the most influential contemporary Russian poets, Arkadii Dragomoshchenko. Not only was 1985 the year when his poem for the first time appeared in an official Soviet publication, but, paradoxically, it was also the period when the poet articulated his break-off with the Russian poetic tradition of by default lyricism and linguistic positivism. According to Aleksandr Skidan, in the mid-1980s, Dragomoshchenko experienced “a linguistic turn” nourished by readings in post-structuralist theory (see “Mezhdunarodnaia konferetsiia”). Studies of Dragomoshchenko's poetry with a chronological dimension only start to appear now, and I aim to contribute to them. This paper will focus on his metapoetic representation of transition from approaching poetry as registration to seeing it as a linguistic game. While most of Dragomoshchenko's later poems seem to respond to post-structuralist sensibility, and some of them contain the names of Derrida and Lacan as part of their textual configuration, poems written in 1985 (“Elegy on Rising Dust” and “Kitchen Elegy”) are peculiar since they also arrange a polemical encounter between intertextual references to Pushkin's programmatic poems, such as “The Prophet” and “Winter Morning,” and post-structuralist stipulations about language. These poems create metapoetic manifestos of transition from the Romantic poetic paradigm springing up from

Enlightenment epistemology to a new poetic language that propagates the collapse of the idea of prophetism and transcendence of logos.

Panelist: Stephanie Sandler, Harvard University

Title: *The Poet's Freedom: Olga Sedakova*

Perhaps all of Olga Sedakova's work is built on paradox, but none so profound as her manner of resisting and responding to history, including her response to historical transition. Her poems and essays insist on a radical freedom, but one that is in a necessary and tense relationship to forms of constraint. It is that paradox, of freedom and constraint, that defines her work. This paper will map the pathways along which Sedakova seeks freedom for art, drawing on the writings of Susan Stewart, Paul Celan, Walter Benjamin, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jonathan Culler. In readings of several short poems, close attention is paid to formal elements, particularly Sedakova's use of rhythm, and to one recurring narrative structure, that of the dream.