

IM CHAT...

*auf Lauras Kleid entblättern  
sich Buchstabenblüten*

В ЭТОТ МИГ  
ОНИ ТАК БЛИЗКИ

*he'd touch her little finger  
should he stretch his right  
hand into Cyberland*

Sergej Birjukov

Nimm den Pfad gleich links durch die Brust.  
Und überschreite die Grenze

*Take the path straight left through the breast.  
And cross the border*

Volker Braun

ウラル山脈の向こうから  
水の言葉で挨拶する  
いま、蛇口をひねるあなたの  
手のひらを  
ひたひたと打つ異国の水

*From beyond the Ural mountains  
Water greets you in its own words  
Now, you turn on the tap  
Water from exotic lands laps  
Against the hollow of your hand*

Yoko Tawada



DFG Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe  
FOR 2603



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Russian-Language Poetry in Transition:  
Poetic Forms – Addressing Boundaries of  
Genre, Language, Culture, and Society across  
Europe, Asia, and the Americas

## The Phenomenon

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Poetry has experienced a global revival in the 21st century: as a medium of individuation, as an open space to create experiments and develop ideas. Or even as a way of social communication and constructive political discourse. Poetry has closed the book and has removed the ornate walls of elitist aesthetics becoming spontaneous, performative, transcultural and well-domiciled in the mindscapes of media communication. Poetry activates people of all ages, surprisingly even – and especially – the younger generation. The fear of reading formally conservative poems has been replaced by the joys of playing with language, appreciating its expressive possibilities and its affective forces.

At the same time, contemporary poetry is flourishing, astonishingly close to people's innermost feelings and thoughts. Poetry thus functions as a seismograph of sensitivities measuring the individual and society as a whole, its crises and potentials.

This is especially true for Russia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union its literature did not just rearrange itself, but extended its scope to Russian literature abroad. What is more, intelligent use of the new media has enabled Russian poetry to create a transnational space interacting with various languages and literary fields whose intellectual layers have been formed by many other national traditions. "Poetry in Transition" can thus be regarded as a highly interdisciplinary and international project, which extends its chronology from the beginning of Perestroika (1985) to the present, encompassing not only Russian-language poetry but also its manifold relations with other literatures. For historical and political reasons, but also due to literary history, three global regions are especially relevant as contextual references for poetry in Russian: Europe, Asia and North America.

## The Idea

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Transition imprints the present in all areas of life, affecting individuals and society. Thresholds and boundaries become transparent, intersect or superimpose themselves. They are also crossed, broken, transformed. Movement emanating from accomplished forms, the processes of change as upheaval or metamorphosis, directional gain for the future intersecting the space of chance – they are all global and yet basic characteristics of our time.

Poetry is not only a medium of expression, but also a venue where transition can be accomplished. The genre is inventing itself anew; poetic language is poly- and even translingual as well as intermedial; within the lyrical text cultures connect in hybrid forms or renegotiate their boundaries. Last but not least, in various societies poetry plays an active part – arguing across other discussion spaces. Today, poetry is the concave mirror of a *conditio humana* defined by transformation.

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我们总得抽出时间，听听来自地下的口信

*Carve out time to listen to the voice  
from underground*

Zang Di

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The *Kolleg* thus explores forms and functions of transition in poetry within its four research areas of genre, language, culture and society. The main focus is on Russian-language poetry comparing it to the poetry of other countries in Asia, Europe and North America. The research on Russian-language poetry in transnational constellations and its relations to the poetry of other, especially Asian countries, entails the exploration of entirely new investigative areas.

## The Implementation

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The project aims at an exchange between various philological cultures, e.g. specializing in linguistics, literature, media and culture studies while creating connections with philosophy and the social sciences. Cooperation between native and foreign philologies is one of the project's central features, as discourses in those fields tend to differ for reasons of politics, academic history and language. At the same time, we are actively promoting an intellectual exchange with the lively poetry scenes of all countries involved. Our research network comprises 150 academics, extends into 23 countries and has invited more than ten specialist fields to participate in our

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Когда мы решаемся ступить,  
не зная что нас ждет,  
на вдохновенья пустой корабль...

*Whenever we decide to drift,  
not knowing what awaits us, on  
inspiration's empty ship*

Ol'ga Sedakova

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project. We are based at Trier University (situated conveniently between Frankfurt-on-Main and Luxembourg), where four senior professors are responsible for our team, with another four senior associated professors, and nine PhD students and postdoctoral researchers forming the core of our junior academic staff. Every year as many as 15 academic fellows are staying for six months or more at the *Kolleg* to complete their research projects. Our international conferences – which are regularly held not only in Trier, but also at other universities and research institutions in Europe, Asia and North America – further strengthen our vibrant academic community; while lectures, readings and dramatic performances are carrying academic research into the deeper strata of society.