

Irene E. Kolchinsky

The Revival of the Russian Literary Avantgarde

The Thaw Generation and Beyond

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Irene Kolchinsky

**The Revival of the
Russian Literary Avant-Garde:
the Thaw Generation and Beyond**



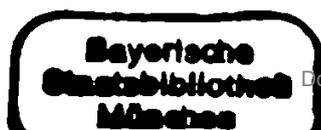
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PREFACE

This study is devoted to the authors who initiated the revival of the Russian avant-garde tradition, which had been brutally suppressed by the Soviet authorities in the mid-1930s. The revival of this tradition took place in the literary underground, where writers who endeavored to fulfil this challenging task largely remained until the collapse of the Soviet regime. Most of them emerged from obscurity only at the beginning of the 1990s, which explains why their dramatic and fascinating history has been so little examined by scholars. Although the situation has changed significantly in the last decade, during which some insightful studies have appeared in both Russia and the West, the subject obviously requires more thorough and systematic exploration. My book aims to narrow important gaps in the scholarship on the Russian literary avant-garde during its least investigated period.¹

The Soviet authorities' intolerance for experimental art became apparent in the late 1920s and grew steadily worse in the years to follow. Labeled as "formalism," experimental art was seen as the chief opponent of Socialist Realism, whose official establishment in 1934 marked a clear end to the first wave of the Russian avant-garde. Only twenty years later, with the beginning of the Thaw, did avant-garde trends in art and literature become visible again, leading to the wide-spread assumption that no experimental art whatsoever had been produced in Russia for almost two decades.

Yet this assumption is wrong. As I discovered in the course of my research, the revival of the avant-garde tradition began in the darkest years of Stalin's rule, largely thanks to the samizdat activities of a young Moscow poet, Nikolai Glazkov (1919-1979). His early verses, written between the late 1930s and the late 1940s, showed a close connection to the major poets of the first Russian avant-garde – Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and the early Maiakovskii. Although Glazkov, who used to call himself "a Neofuturist," appeared to be the single most important avant-garde author of the 1940s, he has remained largely unknown and virtually unstudied. This study of the poet's

¹ Fragments of this work were published in *The Russian Review*, 57, no. 3 (1998); *Slavic and East European Journal*, 43, no. 1 (1999); *Russian Literature*, 50, no. 1 (2001); and *Voprosy literatury*, no. 3 (2000). The latter article, as well as all of my other publications in Russian, appeared under my maiden name, Irina Vinokurova.

samizdat writings is the first in any language. In support of my analysis I use unpublished manuscripts and other unique materials I discovered while working in private archives in Russia.

After Stalin's death in 1953, and beginning with the so-called Thaw, the experimental tradition became significantly stronger. The second wave of the Russian avant-garde began to emerge, initiated by poets who would later be known as the Thaw generation. Born between 1932 and 1938, they began their creative careers in the late 1950s. Although during this period the official attitude toward "formalism" became less intolerant, the most radical and innovative of these poets still had to work in the literary underground.

This book offers a detailed survey of the various unofficial avant-garde groups that sprang up during the Thaw, as well as of individual writers who became active during this period: the Leningrad Neofuturists, the Chertkov group, the so-called Lianozovo poets, and Gennadii Aigi. I also touch on the fate of the "semi-official" avant-garde author Victor Sosnora and the "official" avant-gardist Andrei Voznesenskii, who managed to become an accepted member of the Soviet establishment and pursue a triumphant career. Even now, he effectively outdoes the former underground poets in popularity, remaining – in the eyes of many – the most significant (if not the only) avant-garde author of the Thaw generation. The persistence of this belief prompted me to take a closer look at Voznesenskii's poetic development and his real impact on the experimental tradition. I also focus individually on a representative of the unofficial avant-garde poetry, Vsevolod Nekrasov, who chose to spend more than three decades in the literary underground rather than bow to the state's political and aesthetic demands.

This study of the poets who initiated the revival of the experimental tradition aims not only to define – or sometimes to re-evaluate – their literary reputations, but also to restore the proper historical and literary perspective on developments in experimental poetry in Russia in the mid- and late twentieth century.

CHAPTER I. RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE IN THE 1940s:

NIKOLAI GLAZKOV

INTRODUCTION

The tragic destiny of the Russian post-revolutionary literary avant-garde is generally known. “Despite the fact that the poets and artists of the Russian avant-garde were most enthusiastic in welcoming the Communist Revolution and more willing to serve it and the young Soviet state than any other group,” wrote Vladimir Markov, “their aesthetics and most of their poetic practices have nearly always been officially rejected in Russia.”²

Such an attitude on the part of the authorities had many possible reasons. These included Lenin’s and the other Bolshevik leaders’ personal conservative artistic tastes, the notorious rebelliousness of the exponents of the avant-garde and their claims on leadership; and the unwillingness of the Party to entrust cultural matters even to the most loyal of the authors. The single most important reason, however, was the inability of the avant-garde to assume a role as an educational tool of the Party and to serve as a disseminator of its policies.³ Avant-garde art was criticized as elitist because of its supposed unintelligibility to the rank and file audience, a trait at variance with Lenin’s dictum that art “must have its deepest roots in the very depths of the broad masses of the

² Vladimir Markov. *Russian Futurism: A History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968, vii-viii.

³ Paradoxically, the Bolshevik leaders often preferred an openly anti-Soviet, but aesthetically traditional work to an openly pro-Soviet but experimental one. Lenin, for example, was infuriated by Maiakovskii’s narrative poem “150,000,000,” and, especially, by Lunacharskii’s help in publishing it (see E. Naumov, “Lenin o Maiakovskom” in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, t. 65, Moscow: Akademia nauk, 1958, 210). At the same time, Lenin highly appreciated the émigré author Arkadii Averchenko’s book *Diuzhina nozhei v spiny revolutsii*, published in Paris. He called it “a talented book” and suggested reprinting it in Soviet Russia (“Talantliivaia knizhka” in *V. I. Lenin o kul'ture i iskusstve*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1956, 338-39). A similar attitude was characteristic of Stalin, who was irritated by Meyerhold’s revolutionary theatre, and had destroyed it by the end of the 1930s. Conversely, Stalin was fond of Bulgakov’s politically ambiguous play “Belaia gvardiia” and allowed it to remain on stage for many years. (See E. Gromov, “Stalin: puti esteticheskogo utilitarizma,” *Voprosy literatury*, no. 1 (1995): 119).

working people. It must be understood by those masses and loved by them.”⁴ This Bolshevik precept was subsequently elaborated in the resolution “O politike partii v oblasti khudozhestvennoi literatury ” (1925). Emphasizing the intelligibility to “the millions” as the only condition on which Soviet literature could fulfil its “historic cultural mission,” this resolution launched the official campaign against the experimental art.

The absence of a comprehensive study on the subject is compensated, at least to some extent, by works devoted to major post-revolutionary avant-garde organizations, such as LEF, LTsK, the Imaginists, and the OBERIU. Despite the differences between these groups, they all ended up quite similarly: every one of them was eventually destroyed by the regime. Even the most loyal and influential of the avant-garde organizations, like LEF and LTsK, were unable to survive. Despite all their efforts to adjust to the state’s growing demands, in 1928 they lost their journal “Novyi LEF” which succeeded to “LEF,” closed in 1925. Two years later both groups were attacked for their alienation from Marxism and dissolved.⁵

Those avant-garde organizations that displayed a degree of independence from the regime, such as the Imaginists, were dismissed even earlier and under a cloud of more sinister accusations. The group’s rapid decline began in 1925, when their journal was suspended and the number of their publications was considerably reduced. In 1927 the

⁴ Klara Tsetkin, “Iz knigi ‘Vospominania o Lenine’ ” in *V. I. Lenin o kul'ture i iskusstve*, 583. Here, however, Lenin seems to have been misquoted. Igor Golomstock explains the mystery behind Lenin’s most famous dictum on art: “... the well-known transcripts of Klara Tsetkin’s conversations with Lenin... were published first in German and then in Russian. <...> In Klara Tsetkin’s German text his central thought was expressed somewhat differently: ‘Art must be understood’ (Sie muss von diesen verstanden) rather than ‘... be understandable to them.’ In the first Russian translations this phrase appeared in both variants and gave rise to stormy arguments. ‘Understood’ allowed a more liberal interpretation that the masses could be educated to understand art; ‘understandable’ allowed a more hard-line interpretation. <...> In the increasingly charged atmosphere of the twenties the directive that art should be comprehensible to masses, supported by the authority of the leader, became a central argument in the struggle for realism. At the beginning of the thirties Lenin’s quotation was finally canonized in the later version. <...> The affair of the quotation had a sequel at the beginning of the sixties, during Khrushchev’s ‘thaw.’ A Soviet scholar read the German original and published Lenin’s actual words in the press, together with his commentary. The whole edifice of Soviet aesthetics threatened to collapse. The Institute of Marxism-Leninism apparently held a special meeting to discuss the matter, and its elders came to a Solomon-like judgment: since Klara Tsetkin’s translation appeared during Lenin’s life-time and he did not correct it, then the orthodox variant should be considered correct.” (*Totalitarian Art*, London: Collins Harvill, 1990, 174-175).

⁵ The detailed history of LEF and its struggle for survival could be found in Natasha Kolchevska. *Lef and Developments in Russian Futurism in the 1920s*, Berkeley, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1980; Halina Stephan. “*Lef and The Left Front of The Arts*,” München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1981.

Imaginists, labeled as the exponents of “several déclassé bourgeois groups,”⁶ were discharged.

Not surprisingly, the most tragic fate befell the most unconventional of the avant-garde organizations – the OBERIU. It sprang up, above all, in 1927 – a time already blatantly unfavorable to experimental art. Consequently, the OBERIU members had very few opportunities to publish; their literary activities consisted mainly “of readings, literary evenings, the circulation of manuscripts among friends, performances of plays <...> and lectures.”⁷ These activities, however, also ended in 1931, when the group’s members Kharms and Vvedenskii (together with “zaumnik” Tufanov) were put on trial. They were chiefly condemned for their avant-garde style, which was deemed, as recently published documents attest, a political crime against the Soviet state.⁸

Although the results of the trial turned out to be unexpectedly mild and the majority of the participants returned home after only a brief period of exile, the trial sent a clear message to the literary community: there was no choice left for the avant-garde authors.⁹ They had either to adapt their writings to the state’s aesthetic demands, which would be defined later as the basic principles of Socialist Realism (officially established in 1934), or else reformulate their career goals.¹⁰ Some writers chose the first option, others the second. The former Imaginists Mariengof and Shershenevich tried to survive

⁶ *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, t. 4, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Kommunisticheskoi akademii, 1930, 463.

⁷ George Gibian, “Introduction” in *Russia's Lost Literature of the Absurd*, ed. and trans. by George Gibian, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, 10.

⁸ See “Razgrom OBERIU: materialy sledstvennogo dela,” vstupil'naia stat'a, publikatsiia i kommentarii I. Mal'skogo, *Oktiabr'*, no. 11 (1992): 170-171.

⁹ No wonder that some of the prominent avant-garde authors rushed to participate in the campaign against the OBERIU. Aseev, in particular, was the first among the writers who publicly condemned the Oberiuts and Zabolotskii, accusing them of mockery of Soviet reality. Later Aseev's speech was published in *Krasnaia nov'* (no. 2, 1932) under the title “Segodniashnii den' sovetskoi poezii.”

¹⁰ The persecution of the avant-garde did not contradict the fact (widely discussed in recent years) that some Soviet avant-gardists of the 1920s were as authoritarian in their methods and goals as their opponents, and therefore may be considered not only the victims of Soviet cultural ideology, but in a sense its progenitors as well. See Boris Grois. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. C. Rougle, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. However, Grois' attempts to depict Socialist Realism as the direct heir of the Russian avant-garde (see also his essay “The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde” in *Laboratory of Dreams, The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, eds. John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) are rather controversial. On this matter see John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich, “Introduction” in *Laboratory of Dreams*, 12-14.

by writing for the cinema and theater and by doing literary translations. The former OBERIU members Kharms and Vvedenskii, as well as their colleagues Oleinikov and Zabolotskii, resorted to writing children's literature, which did not save any of them from subsequent arrest.¹¹ Kruchenykh, the former "bogy man of Russian literature," began to earn his livelihood working as an archivist and a secondhand bookseller.¹² Not to mention that the most prominent of the avant-garde authors – Maiakovskii – quit his poetic career in the most radical way by committing suicide in 1930. And we can only guess what Maiakovskii would have done had he managed to live longer: it is not unlikely that he would have adopted much more conventional aesthetics. It is enough to recall his confession to Aseev that "if the Central Committee orders us to write only in iambs <...> I would write in iambs."¹³ At the time, Aseev was not yet ready to accept such harsh terms of surrender, but within only a few years he had made his awkward peace with the regime, followed by such former comrades-in-arms as the LEF member Kirsanov and the Constructivist Sel'vinskii. Of course, none of them began to write *only* in iambs,¹⁴ but all of them were forced to restrain their taste for formal innovation. Although they continued to use accentual verse, inexact rhymes, and sound play well into the 1930s and even later, they began to employ these techniques with obvious caution, in the process forsaking their previous impressive achievements. No wonder that all of their masterpieces, thanks to which, incidentally, they had made names for themselves in poetry, were written in the 1920s. The exploration of ideologically correct subjects, to which they energetically turned in the 1930s, did not secure them any special right for serious experimentation. After 1935, they were unable either to reprint their old experimental works, such as Sel'vinskii's "Ulialaevshina," or to publish new ones, like Kirsanov's "Bukva M" (from his collection *Novoe*). Nothing of the kind was allowed in

¹¹ Oleinikov was arrested in 1937. Zabolotskii was arrested in 1938. Kharms and Vvedenskii were arrested in 1941.

¹² See Sergei M. Sukhoparov. *Alexei Kruchenykh. Sud'ba Budetlianina*, ed. by W. Kazack, München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1992, 128-134.

¹³ Nikolai Aseev, "K tvorcheskoi istorii poemy 'Maiakovski nachinaetsia'," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, t. 93 Moscow: Nauka, 1983, 488. See also the same episode in "Maiakovski nachinaetsia," in Nikolai Aseev. *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, t. 3, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964, 475-476.

¹⁴ In iambs, however, are written Sel'vinskii's tragedies "Rytzar' Ioann" (1937) and "Livonskaia voina" (1946).

print anymore: in the following year, 1936, the next round of the official campaign against “formalism” broke out.

This campaign, which gathered strength side by side with the establishment of Socialist Realism, intensified the persecution of the avant-garde not only in literature, but also in the visual arts, music, and the theater, until the last trace of it had apparently vanished.¹⁵ The very possibility of any underground avant-garde activities during the terror seemed highly doubtful, not only because of concrete official acts of suppression, but also and primarily because of “a cultural and spiritual atmosphere which makes the flowering of that art <...> unthinkable even more than materially impossible.”¹⁶ Thus it is all the more surprising that a number of avant-garde texts were created in Stalin’s time, in secret and in silence. They began to surface in a politically more hospitable era.

This process was started with the emergence of the major works of the former OBERIU members, first published by George Gibian under the characteristic title *Russia's Lost Literature of the Absurd* (1971). Then, in 1979, the unconventional poetry of Georgii Obolduev appeared in print in the Cologne series *Arbeiten und Texte zur Slavistic*. Finally, the Neofuturist texts of Nikolai Glazkov were published. Written in the

¹⁵ See Gleb Struve’s observations: “In visual arts the ban on Formalism and the insistence on representational realism led to a frank revival of stiff and lifeless ‘Academicism’ of worst variety. In the theater Meyerhold and Tairov, who were responsible for the most interesting and daring theatrical experiments, became the principal targets for attack. Tairov after a time managed to work his way back into the field, but Meyerhold, who was first deprived of his theater, eventually disappeared from the scene and met his end in a concentration camp. In music one of the first conspicuous victims was Dmitry Shostakovich, whose opera *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* – until then regarded as one of the most notable achievements of Soviet music – seems to have incurred the displeasure of Stalin himself in 1935, with the result that a storm of criticism was unleashed against Shostakovich in the Soviet press, both general and musical, and various musical bodies passed resolutions condemning the opera as an expression of ‘rotten bourgeois Formalism’.” (*Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971, 260).

¹⁶ Renato Poggioli. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. by G. Fitzgerald, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968, 100. Not surprisingly, even the most rigorous of avant-garde writers lost their zest for further experimentation at the beginning of the 1930s, as their personal archives (which have recently become available to scholars) clearly demonstrate. See, for example, Sergei Sukhoparov’s account of Kruchenykh’s poetic archive, which brought him to the conclusion that the appearance of the narrative poems “Ironiada” (1930) and “Rubiniada” (1930) was “the final event of [Kruchenykh’s] avant-garde activities” (*Aleksei Kruchenykh*, 119). See also Gerald Janecek’s description of Chicherin’s archives at IMLI and TsGALI, which show that very little was produced by the former Constructivist after 1930, and only a few items “indicate an attempt to rekindle the spark of literary creation in prose, but these attempts were stillborn” (“A.N. Chicherin, Constructivist poet,” *Russian Literature* XXV (1989): 511).

1930s and 40s, Glazkov's poems reached Soviet readers only in the late 1980s.¹⁷

These works, needless to say, are of unequal literary merit; however, all of them are equally important in challenging our knowledge about the most oppressive period in the history of the Russian literary avant-garde. Yet, unlike the OBERIU members and even Obolduev, Glazkov hardly received adequate scholarly attention. Although several valuable articles on Glazkov have appeared in past years,¹⁸ his contribution to the experimental tradition is still to be investigated.

Nikolai Glazkov was a writer with a rather unusual destiny. He was almost totally unknown in the West and very little known in Russia, but enjoyed – until his death in 1979 – real fame among a select group of Moscow literati of different generations and different levels of official recognition. Among his most fervent admirers were celebrities like Lili Brik and Evgenii Evtushenko, as well as authors of the literary underground. Glazkov's fame was based not on the poems he regularly published after 1957, which exemplified a perfect compromise with the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, but on early pieces he was never able to get into print. The poet distributed them in the form of handmade books, some of which displayed the word "Samsebiaizdat" (Self-publishing) on their covers. Eventually this neologism was contracted to "Samizdat," making Glazkov the true inventor of a term that became internationally famous decades later.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Nikolai Glazkov. *Izbrannoe*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989. The most comprehensive collection of Glazkov's early verses contains his later book, [Seriia] *Samye moi stikhi*, Moscow: Slovo, 1995.

¹⁸ See David Samoilov, "U vrat Poetograda," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, June 25, 1980, reprinted in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1989, 397-404. Benedict Sarnov, "Vechnyi rab svoei svobody," *Novyi mir*, no. 2 (1987): 255-260; reprinted in *Ibid.*, 411-440. Evgenii Evtushenko "Skomorokh i bogatyr' " in Nikolai Glazkov, *Izbrannoe*, 3-10; reprinted in *Ibid.*; Genrikh Sapgir, "Nikolai Glazkov," in *Samizdat Veka*, ed. Anatolii Streliaanyi et al, Minsk-Moscow: Polifakt, 1997, 372.

¹⁹ Not accidentally, in a recent anthology of Soviet samizdat, *Samizdat Veka* (1997), all poetry is collected under the title "Nepokhozhie stikhi," which is a line from Glazkov's early poem: "Что такое стихи хорошие? / Те, которые непохожие. / Что такое стихи плохие? / Те, которые никакне." (What does it mean, good poems? / Those ones that are different. / What does it mean, bad poems? / Those ones that are conventional; *Izbrannoe*, 469). This and all other translations are my own, unless noted otherwise.

“... BUT, COMRADES, I DO NOT FIT IN ANY FRAMEWORK”

Nikolai Glazkov was born on January 30, 1919 in the village of Lyskovo, Makarevskii district. Several years later the family moved to Moscow, where the poet's father worked as a lawyer. His arrest and imprisonment in March 1938 marked an end to the relative affluence of the family; Glazkov's mother, a German language teacher, was left to raise her two sons alone. Despite this tragedy, later that year Glazkov graduated from high school and entered the Philology Department of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute. By this time he had already produced a significant number of poems that were surprisingly mature for his age. Unlike most beginners, Glazkov did not try to conceal his poetic antecedents, openly linking himself to the Futurist tradition as represented by the young Maiakovskii, Khlebnikov, and Kruchenykh. Their flamboyant manifestoes were closely echoed in his own juvenile “Manifesto” written in 1939:

Вне времени и притяжения
 Легла души моей Сахара
 От беззастенчивости гения
 До гениальности нахала

 Я мир люблю. Но я плюю на мир
 Со всеми буднями и снами.
 Мой вечный образ вечно юными
 Пускай возносится как знамя.
 Знамена, впрочем, тоже старятся
 И остаются небыллицы.
 Но человек, как я, останется:
 Он молодец – и не боится.²⁰

(Beyond time and gravity
 Sahara of my soul is stretching
 From impudence of a genius
 To ingenuity of impudent.

I love the world. But I don't give a damn about it
 And all its humdrum life and dreams.
 Let the eternally young raise as a banner
 My youthful image.

Banners, however, also grow old,
 And only fables remain,

²⁰ *Izbrannoe*, 184.

But a man like me will live on forever,
A fine fellow, and unafraid.)

The last line of Glazkov's poem gives a new twist to the traditional genre. The poet's characteristic statement about "a man... unafraid" would be hardly necessary in the Futurist manifestoes produced at the beginning of the 1910s, but it was absolutely apt by the end of the 1930s. Now, "a fine fellow" had every reason to be afraid. Even the boasting and self-promotion, which constituted the very essence of the Futurism, and which Glazkov accurately copied, were not politically innocuous any more. In 1939, there was only one designated "genius" in the country, whose image "was raised as a banner" by Soviet youth. It was Stalin himself, and he did not encourage any competitors.

In his early poems Glazkov also enthusiastically employed many of the Futurist favorite themes, which, in turn, sounded newly challenging in the changed historical context. First of all, there was the theme of the artist's alienation in a world of philistines, as is found in the following piece:

Мне нужен мир второй,
Огромный, как нелепость,
А первый мир маячит, не маня.

Долой его, долой:
В нем люди ждут троллейбус,
А во втором – меня.²¹

(I need another world,
As immense as an absurdity,
While this world looms, but does not attract.

Down with it, down:
In this world, people are waiting for a trolleybus,
While in another world they are waiting for me.)

The same theme was even more pronounced in the second of Glazkov's "Manifestoes" also written in 1939. Additionally, it strongly affirmed an artistic rebellion as a way of life:

Я забыть постараюсь те сны,
Где сюжет – скачки по горам как,
Но, товарищи, мне тесны
Очертания всяческих рамок.

²¹ *Samye moi stikhi*, 8.

Я велик и не на ходулях,
 Мой разум и вера не шатки,
 Я покину трамвай на ходу,
 И не просто, а с задней площадки.

Мне ль удариться снова в запой?
 И – растак твоего ферзя!..
 И полезу через забор,
 Если лазить туда нельзя..²²

(I will try to forget those dreams,
 Where the plot is like a horseback ride in the mountains,
 But, comrades, I do not fit
 in any framework.

I am grand even without stilts,
 My mind and faith are not shaky.
 I will leave the moving streetcar,
 And not through the doors, but from the rear bumper.

Why don't I plunge into a new drinking bout?
 And if I do, then to hell with your chess queen!..
 And I will climb over a fence,
 If climbing there is not permitted.)

Of course, Glazkov's romantic revolt was far less aggressive than the Futurists' notorious statements, which filled their manifestoes, treaties and verses. But although comparatively modest, Glazkov's confessions sounded defiant in the Soviet environment, in which, supposedly, there were no longer any grounds for alienation, let alone rebellion.

In Glazkov's early verses one can find such characteristic Futurist devices as inexact and compound rhymes («по горам как – рамок» and «бугры– вдрызг»), as well as a wide range of vulgarisms, including blatant obscenities²³ and common euphemisms, like «растак» from the cited above “Manifesto.” A similar type of an euphemism Glazkov employs in the poem “Gauguin” (1939):

Ее зовут Вайраумати
 И буйволы бегут.
 Я ее не на кровати,
 А на берегу.²⁴

²² *Izbrannoe*, 185.

²³ See, for example, “V melkikh i griaznykh delakh...” (1939), in *Samye moi stikhi*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

(Her name is Vairaumati
And buffaloes are running.
But I her not on the bed
But on the ocean shore.)

The matter-of-fact, playful eroticism of the last two lines also links the poem with the Futurists, who liked to use flamboyant erotic images in opposition to the lofty, sophisticated, mystical eroticism of the Symbolists.²⁵ But at the end of the 1930s Glazkov had a different and obviously more powerful opponent: it was the growing puritanism of Soviet aesthetics, which banished any kind of eroticism from art and literature.²⁶

Although Glazkov's poetic idol was at that time Maiakovskii (he even created a slogan "Forward to Maiakovskii!"²⁷), he showed strong interest in much more radical experimentation, associated with the wildest of the Russian Futurists – Kruchenykh. No wonder, then, that the name of Kruchenykh shows up in one of Glazkov's poems:

Ночь легла в безжизненных и черных,
Словно стекла выбил дебошир...
Но не ночь, а – как сказал Крученых –
Дыр – Бул – Щил.²⁸

(Night lay down in the lifeless and dark.
As if a hooligan had smashed the windows...
Yet it was not the night, but, as Kruchenykh put it,
Dyr – Bul – Shchyl.)

As we see here, Glazkov also quoted the poet's best known line, which had become a trademark of *zaum'*, Kruchenykh's famous invention.²⁹ Of course the profound

²⁵ See on this matter Alexander Flaker, "Avangard i erotica," *Russian Literature*, XXXII (1992): 42-51.

²⁶ As Herman Ermolaev shows in his study on censorship in Soviet literature, "a puritanism in the official attitude toward the intimate side of life" was steadily growing throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s, causing the expurgation of all erotic elements, including sexual references and allusions, from contemporary works of literature (*Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991*, Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1997, 92).

²⁷ Glazkov's closest friend and comrade-in-arms, Iulian Dolgin, wrote to me in his letter of October 30, 1997: "Glazkov's favorite poet was Maiakovskii. His slogan of 1939 was characteristic: 'Forward to Maiakovskii!' His poem, written in the same year and dedicated to me, began: «Не ужас моряков сковал, а просто лень. / Во имя Маяковского / Вино в бокалы лей!...» (The sailors were stricken not by the terror, / But by laziness. / In honor of Maiakovskii / Pour wine into the glasses.)"

²⁸ *Izbrannoe*, 26.

²⁹ In one of Glazkov's later collections, *Piataia kniga* (1966), one finds a parody of Kruchenykh, where the same line is quoted: «А я, дебошир, / Сказал: Дыр Бул Щил! / И этим добился бессмертной славы.»

incompatibility between the aesthetics of *zaum*’ and Soviet cultural ideology rendered the former an *ars non grata* from the very beginning of the 1930s,³⁰ but this did not discourage the poet. The very beginning of the stanza is revealing: «Ночь легла в безжизненных и черных», which sounds quite *zaum*’-like, due to the omission of the object of the preposition. Such an omission of the essential part of the sentence was, by no means, accidental: precisely this simple way of producing a piece of *zaum*’ Kruchenykh recommended to “young authors” in his treatise “Novye puti slova” (1913). “Elimination of the subject or other parts of speech, elimination of pronouns, prepositions, etc.” is listed there among other quick recipes for producing an “irregular structuring of the sentence” that generates “movement and a new perception of the world.”³¹ None of the “young authors,” however, had rushed to follow the poet’s recommendations in more than a decade; in fact, even the most loyal of Kruchenykh’s friends and defenders, Maiakovskii, stated in his speech to the proletarian writers: “I would be the worst idiot, if I were to say: ‘Comrades, copy Kruchenykh with his dyr bul shchyl.’”³²

But this was exactly what Glazkov was doing in his early poetry. Here is a poem written in 1939:

Пряч. Пруч. Прич. Проч.
 Пяч. Поч. Пуч.
 Охгоэхоэхаха...
 Фиолетовая дрянь.³³
 (Priach. Pruch. Prich. Proch.
 Piach. Poch. Puch.
 Okhgoekhoekhakha...
 Violet tosh.)

It is entitled “Avstraliiskaia Pliasovaia” and even the title refers to Kruchenykh’s poem

(And I, the hooligan, said: Dyr-bul-shchyl! And thus achieved immortal fame; 148). In Glazkov’s oeuvre one can also find several poems dedicated to Kruchenykh (“Budetliane,” 1968; “Futuristy,” 1970).

³⁰ See on this matter Sukhoparov, 124-127.

³¹ In *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928*, trans. and ed. Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, 73.

³² V. Maiakovskii, “Vystuplenie na Pervoi Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii proletarskikh pisatelei.” *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trinadtsati tomakh*, t. 12, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958, 270.

³³ Archive of N.N.Glazkov. Also quoted by Ternovskii in “Chto zapomnilos’” in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 83.

“Pliasovaia”: «кваб / тарад / тара пин / пур / квара / куаба / вакабр / трбрк / брктр». This poem was quoted in his “Tel’ (ale stil’) literatorov” (1915) with the proud commentary “we sing like only we are able to do, daring and bold,”³⁴ a description which young Glazkov, of course, had every right to apply to himself. One should be truly “daring and bold” to “sing” like this in 1939, although Glazkov’s “*zaum*’ songs” might look somewhat derivative compared with those of his predecessor.

The Futurist influence can be also seen in “Avstraliiskaia Pliasovaia” primitivist atmosphere, carefully cultivated by Glazkov, who would declare in his narrative poem “Stepan Kumyrskii” (1942): «Я и Долгин, мы были за / Негритянскую народность» (Me and Dolgin, we were both for / Negro nationality.³⁵) This confession, somewhat cryptic if taken out of context, was, evidently, an allusion to Kruchenykh’s treatise “Novye puti slova,” in which he praised a “puny and pale man,” who “felt the urge to rejuvenate his soul by getting in touch with the strong-rough African gods,” “fell in love with their wild-free language, and with the primitive man’s cutting teeth and gaze, animal-like in its sharpness.”³⁶ A strong interest in “primitive” cultures, rites and myths was typical not only of Kruchenykh, but also of Khlebnikov, although in their own practices they concentrated primarily on the Slavic past. In their search for new forms and new ideas they rejected along with other Futurists the whole modern period of Russian literature, beginning with Pushkin, who, according to their notorious suggestion, should be thrown “from the Ship of Modernity.”³⁷

The same intention, incidentally, was not foreign to Glazkov, as his poem “Evgenii Onegin” demonstrates:

Онегина любила Таня.
Но он Татьяну не любил.
И друга Ленского убил
И утонул в тоске скитаний.

Потом ее он снова встретил
И ей признался, но она

³⁴ *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, 93-94.

³⁵ Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

³⁶ *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, 75.

³⁷ “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste,” in *Ibid.*, 52.

Нашла супруга в высшем свете
И будет век ему верна.³⁸

(Tania loved Onegin,
But he did not love her.
And he killed his friend Lenskii
And drowned in the anguish of wandering.

Later, he met her once more,
And confessed his love to her, but she
Had found a spouse in high society
And said she would be faithful to him forever.)

This re-telling of the famous “novel in verse” brings to mind Kruchenykh’s numerous attacks on Pushkin, especially the one in which he suggested that the whole of “Evgenii Onegin” could easily be expressed in two lines: «ени – вони, си – е – тся.»³⁹ It is precisely this «ени – вони» that is evoked in Glazkov’s poem, which mockingly reduces the novel to a formula, – in this case, not a phonetic one, but a semantic one. And Glazkov’s gesture was no less daring than the Futurists’ outrageous escapades – particularly in view of the new political conditions. It is enough to recall the official commemoration of the centenary of Pushkin’s death in 1937, when the poet was taken under the state’s almighty protection.⁴⁰

Kruchenykh’s attacks on Pushkin were part of his vigorous protest against the ideological, philosophical and moral top-heaviness of Russian literature, which he jokingly referred to as the “Salvation Army.”⁴¹ The poet advocated a “new art without preaching,”⁴² and this idea obviously made an impact on Glazkov, who claimed that he was “not an archpriest, but a Neofuturist.”⁴³ In his struggle against didacticism Kruchenykh promoted all sorts of logical and semantical incongruities. These can also be

³⁸ *Samye moi stikhi*, 11.

³⁹ “Tel’ (ale stil’) literatorov,” in A. Kruchenykh, *Apocalipsis v russkoi literature*, Moscow: MAF, 1923, 32.

⁴⁰ See Paul Debreczeny, “‘Zhitie Aleksandra Boldinskogo’: Pushkin’s Elevation to Sainthood in Soviet Culture,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (1991): 283-85.

⁴¹ “Chort i rechetvortsy” (1913-1922), in A. Kruchenykh, *Apocalipsis v russkoi literature*, 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴³ The poem “Sebe” (1940): “Свои грехи преодолей / Как Эверест турист, / И ты не протонерей, / А неофутурист” (Get over your sins / As a tourist would [overcome] Everest, / And you are not an archpriest, / But a Neofuturist; *Samye moi stikhi*, 46).

found in Glazkov's early poems:

Колосья подкосило колесо
 Да ехали да мужики да на телеге,
 Да ехали да пили кюрасо,
 А вдаль текли ручьи да реки.

Ехали они, куда вела их совесть,
 Да по дороге обнимали баб.
 А другие люди, философясь,
 Проклинали пройденный этап.⁴⁴

(The wheel cut down ears of grain
 And peasants rode in a wagon,
 Rode and drank curaçao,
 And creeks and rivers flowed away.

They rode, where their conscience led them,
 And on the way they hugged their wenches.
 But other people, philosophizing,
 Cursed the most recent stage of history.)

Glazkov mixes «мужики», «кюрасо», and the Soviet clichés «куда вела их совесть» and «пройденный этап» directly in accordance with Kruchenykh's concept of "new art." Since the beginning of the 1930s, however, this sort of poetry could only be interpreted as an attempt to mock Soviet reality, as the OBERIU first trial had already clearly demonstrated. Glazkov's constant use of Soviet clichés in this and other absurdist poems made him particularly vulnerable to such accusations. His poem "Ballada," written in the same year 1939, was especially challenging in this respect:

Он вошел в распахнутой шубе,
 Какой-то сверток держал.
 Зуб его не стоял на зубе,
 Незнакомец дрожал.

Потом заговорил отрывисто, быстро,
 Рукой по лбу провел, –
 Из глаз его посыпались искры
 И попадали на ковер.

Ковер загорелся, и струйки огня
 Потекли по обоям вверх;
 Огонь оконные рамы обнял
 И высунулся за дверь.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Незнакомец думал: гореть нам, жить ли?
 Решил вопрос в пользу «жить».
 Вынул из свертка огнетушитель
 И начал пожар тушить.

Когда погасли последние вспышки
 Затухающих искр,
 Незнакомец сказал, что слишком
 Пустился на риск...⁴⁵

(He entered in an unbuttoned fur coat,
 He held a sort of parcel.
 His teeth were chattering,
 The stranger shivered.

Then he began to talk disconnectedly and fast,
 Ran his hand over his forehead, –
 Sparks flew from his eyes
 And fell all over the carpet.

The carpet caught fire, and streaks of fire
 Began climbing up the wallpaper;
 The fire embraced window frames
 And thrust itself outside the door.

The stranger thought whether to burn or to live
 And made decision in favor of life.
 He drew a fire extinguisher from his parcel
 And began to extinguish the fire.

When the last flashes of the dying sparks
 Disappeared.
 The stranger said
 That he took too much risk...)

As we can see, the poet had turned to the genre of the ballad, extremely popular among Soviet authors. The genre seemed perfectly suitable for touching or pathetic subjects (“A ballad isn’t a young lad, / but if in pain its words grow sad / and words explain just why they’re sung sad, / then younger still will be that ballad”⁴⁶), and was customarily used for the glorification of revolutionary deeds. Glazkov, however, filled his ballad up with totally bizarre content, openly ridiculing a genre that became sacrosanct in Soviet aesthetics. Clearly, it was a dangerous game, but he did not exercise any caution.

⁴⁵ *Izbrannoe*, 33.

⁴⁶ Maiakovskii, “Pro eto” (1923). Trans. by Herbert Marshall, in *Mayakovsky*, trans. and ed. by Herbert Marshall. Hill and Wang: New York, 1965, 164.

On the contrary, Glazkov made every effort to introduce this and the other poems to the largest audience possible, as his friends' memoirs unanimously confirmed. Like the Futurists, Glazkov longed for direct contact with public, and he energetically arranged readings of poetry in his fellow-students' apartments. There he promoted himself as the most ingenious poet of the time («Самый лучший поэт в СССР», as he blatantly put it in one of his poems⁴⁷), which was perfectly in the spirit of his predecessors. Not surprisingly, other Futurist activities, such as the organization of a group and the compilation of poetic miscellanies, were also part of Glazkov's immediate agenda.

THE "NEBYVALISTS"

At the end of 1939 Glazkov came up with the idea of organizing a literary group called the "Nebyvalists" (The Unprecedented Ones). This plan was enthusiastically supported by one of his schoolmates and closest friends Iulian Dolgin, whom I was fortunate enough to meet. Dolgin's oral reminiscences, which I recorded during our conversations in the summer of 1996, the written memoirs of other members of the group, as well as Glazkov's narrative poem "Stepan Kumyrskii" (1942) – a kind of chronicle in verse,⁴⁸ help to reconstruct the history of "Nebyvalism." It actually began with Glazkov's desperate rebellion against the official literary canon, into which his own poetry obviously did not fit. Out of this rebellion, according to Glazkov's verse chronicle, "Nebyvalism" was born:

... В себя всамделишно поверив,
Против себя я возмущал
Чернильных душ и лицемеров,
Воинствующих совмещан.
.....
От их учебы и возни
Уйти,
Найти свое ученье...
Вот так небывализм возник –
Литературное течение.

⁴⁷ "Star stal i ustal..." (Archive of N.N. Glazkov).

⁴⁸ Brief extracts from "Stepan Kumyrskii" appeared in Glazkov's posthumous collection *Автопортрет* (1984), 133-136, as well as in *Izbrannoe*, 175, 340-342.

Есть бунтари, я был таким,
 Что никаким не верят басням,
 Еще был Юлиан Долгин,
 Я познакомился тогда с ним.⁴⁹

(...Beginning to believe seriously in myself
 I set against me
 Pettifoggers and hypocrites
 Militant Soviet philistines.

.....
 I wished to get away from
 Their hectoring and noise...
 In this way nebyvalism was created ,
 A literary movement.

There are rebels, I was one such,
 Who do not believe in fables,
 Also there was Iulian Dolgin,
 I met him at that time.)

Iulian Dolgin, whose name inevitably emerges at this point in the chronicle, also offered recollections of the same events. Recorded in prose, they add valuable details to Glazkov's poetic description. According to Dolgin's account, he met Glazkov in the halls of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute, and they immediately formed a friendship based on their mutual interest in innovative poetry.⁵⁰ During our conversation in July 1996, Dolgin elaborated on this story:

I was inspired by Glazkov's poems, written in 1938,⁵¹ they looked so challenging against the background of contemporary poetry... I spent a lot of time in the Lenin Library, I was not able to obtain all I wanted, but I managed to get something, including Marinetti's manifesto, Dada ... I wrote "The Manifesto of the Century," in which I extolled the movements prohibited during that period. I declared: "Long live Imaginism, Futurism, Constructivism!," ending this enumeration with 'Long live, 'Nebyvalism!'" Glazkov joined in: "Let's give this name to our group."

⁴⁹ Archive of N.N.Glazkov.

⁵⁰ See Dolgin, "V sorokovye gody" in *Vospominania o Nikolae Glazkove*, 97. Compare his account with the memoirs of the former "Nebyvalist" Aleksei Ternovskii: "In 1939 'Nebyvalism' was born... It was created by Kolia [Glazkov] and the freshman Iulian Dolgin" (*Ibid.*, 82). See also the memoirs of the well-known poet David Samoilov: "I met Nikolai Glazkov in 1939... At this time he was with Iulian Dolgin. Together they formed a group of the 'Nebyvalists.' It was a literary movement that consisted, basically, of two people" (*Ibid.*, 397).

⁵¹ As Dolgin explained to me, he meant primarily Glazkov's so-called "Manifestoes," eventually published in *Izbrannoe*, 184-86 (Personal interview, July 26, 1996).

The group was promptly organized in the same year, 1939; it included, besides Dolgin and Glazkov, several of their fellow-students, as well as several of friends: Aleksei Ternovskii, Ivan Kulibaba, Nikolai Kirillov, Evgenii Vedenskii, and a few others.⁵² One of the group members, Evgenii Vedenskii, who studied engineering, but knew Glazkov from high school,⁵³ would later recall:

Once, at one of our meetings (this was still in 1939), Kolia [Glazkov] unexpectedly suggested: "Let's produce a poetic miscellany of the 'Nebyvalists'." "And who are they, the 'Nebyvalists'?" I asked in surprise. – "This is my invention. We are founders of a new literary movement – 'Nebyvalism.' – 'And how many of us are there?' – 'Approximately ten, maybe more.' " ⁵⁴

The "Nebyvalists" regularly gathered for readings and discussions of poetry, which focused, quite understandably, on their own writings. Each of them tried their hand at verse making, but, as quickly became apparent, the majority of the "Nebyvalists" had little personal ambition and saw themselves as followers of Glazkov.⁵⁵ Yet they were not merely a passive flock. They actively encouraged Glazkov in his experimentations, which otherwise would probably have been far less consistent. In particular, they singled out the Kruchenykh-like features of his poetry and adopted them as the group's aesthetic principles: illogicality, primitivism, expressiveness, disharmony.⁵⁶ These principles, which were almost identical to Kruchenykh's basic statements, summarized in "Deklaratsiia zaumnogo iazyka" (1921),⁵⁷ were called by the "Nebyvalists" "kity"

⁵² Vedenskii, "V shkole i posle" in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 63-65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁵ See on this matter Vedenskii, 61; Ternovskii, 77. Besides Glazkov, only one of the "Nebyvalists," Nikolai Kirillov (1915–1968), would become a professional poet, although a conventional and mediocre one. Dolgin, who told me that he never gave up poetry, was not a poet by profession; he worked as a methodologist, specializing in educational cinema, and later as a librarian (Personal interview, July 26, 1996).

⁵⁶ See Vedenskii, 62-63.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, Kruchenykh had fully anticipated this development, predicting the emergence of the "Nebyvalists" with astonishing accuracy: "Thus I will stand firmly and wait; perhaps, in twenty years or so, the rest of the poets will eventually drag themselves up to my level ..." (*Sdvigologia russkogo stikha*, Moscow: MAF, 1922, 38). Indeed, they "dragged themselves up" to Kruchenykh's level right on time – even a couple of years before his "deadline." A definite familiarity with Kruchenykh's theories, in particular, his theory of "shifts," was evident in Dolgin's "Nebyvalist" verses (1939), which he quoted by heart to me: "Istoriia sdvigov iz tori i vigov" (The history of shifts from tories and whigs) during our conversation on July 29, 1996.

(whales), and surfaced in one of Glazkov's poems:

Четыре в мире жили были
Небывалистические кита.
Они плыли, плыли, плыли,
Плыли, плыли, плыли, плыли,
Плыли, только не туда...⁵⁸

(Once upon a time there lived four
Nebyvalist whales
They swam, swam, swam,
Swam, swam, swam, swam,
Swam, but in the wrong direction...)

Of course, these "whales" propelled Glazkov and the other "Nebyvalists" in a politically "wrong" direction, but the poets obviously did not care. Rather they made these principles the basis of the miscellany, which they jointly created at the very beginning of 1940.⁵⁹ Among the participants were four veteran "Nebyvalists" – Glazkov, Dolgin, Ternovskii, and Vedenskii, while three others – Shekhtman, Bazhenov, and Zmoiro – happened to be their friends or relatives.

The miscellany was produced in several typewritten copies, but apparently only one of them, preserved in Dolgin's archive, survived the Soviet period. This copy has a brightly colored cover featuring four jolly whales, an imaginative illustration of and allusion to the "fundamental" principles of "nebyvalism" – expressiveness, primitivism, illogicality, disharmony. Glazkov, on his part, provided "Evgenii Onegin," "Gauguin," "Kolos'ia podkosilo koleso," and the like, some of which were even more radical in their experimentalism. The poem "Zaklinanie, chtoby byli den'gi" is one of the such:

Здесь все отдам

А там,
Было б легче

⁵⁸ Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

⁵⁹ According to Dolgin's oral recollections, there were actually two "Nebyvalist" poetic miscellanies, produced approximately at the same time. The first of these was compiled by Dolgin, the second one by Glazkov and Vedenskii. In all probability, the latter is no longer extant. These miscellanies differed slightly from each other by reason of the contributors and the selection of poems (Personal interview, July 28, 1996). They also had different titles: Dolgin's collection had none at all, but Glazkov's boasted a truly striking one: "Raspavlennyi vismut. Tvoricheskii zhitok sinusoidy nebyvalistov," also known simply as "Tvoricheskii zhitok" (Vedenskii, 61-65). This was the title of the miscellany mentioned in Glazkov's verse chronicle.

Эх че-
стная,
Знаю.

Провожу рукой.
График там такой

А здесь
Есть

График такого вида.
Невелика обида.

(Here I will give up everything,

But there
It would be easier
Ah, sain-
ted one,
I know.

I brush my hand.
There is a kind of plotted curve there

But here

The plotted curve has a different shape.
No big deal.)

The poem's elliptical sentences follow each other without any apparent logic – in the same way people express themselves when they are worried or distressed. Such an emotional state, as Kruchenykh insisted in “Deklaratsiia zaumnogo iazyka,” could be convincingly conveyed only by means of *zaum'*, and Glazkov's poem seems designed to prove this point. As he did on other occasions, Glazkov adopted one of Kruchenykh's general recommendations and applied it to his own verse with true ingenuity. The same ingenuity is found in the title “Nebyvalism menia” (remarkable for its unexpected genitive case), under which Glazkov's poems are united in the miscellany. These poems comprise the majority of the collection, largely determining its character and shape. The other six contributors – Dolgin, Vedenskii, Ternovskii, Shekhtman, Bazhenov, and Zmoiro – tried to act in accordance with their leader and supplied poetic productions that would comply with the aesthetic principles of the group.

Iulian Dolgin's poem “Veselaia liudoedskaia” is an example of “primitivism”:

ТУМБА, Тамба, тумба, ТУМБА,
ЭЭЭ – ООО – УУУ – ИИИ!!!
Тумба, ТУМБА, Тумба, ТУМБА,
Выбивают бубнами.

Девушку я любил,
 Спелую, как банан,
 Девушку я просил:
 ЭЭЭ, Убежим в лес.

Нет, – смеялась она.
 ЭЭЭ, уйди от меня,
 Как убегу я в лес?
 Зубы твои не остры.

Зубы клыком я точил,
 Острым из пасти льва,
 Девушку я просил:
 УУУ! Убежим в лес.

Нет, – смеялась она, –
 УУУ, уйди от меня,
 Как убегу я в лес?
 Нет у тебя черепов. <...>

(TUMBA, Tamba, tumba, TUMBA,
 AAA-OOO-UUU-EEE!!!
 Tumba, TUMBA, Tumba, TUMBA,
 They are beating tambourines.

I loved a girl,
 Who was ripe as a banana,
 I begged this girl
 “AAA! Let’s run away to the forest.”

“No,” she laughed.
 “AAA, leave me alone.
 How can I run away to the forest?
 Your teeth are not sharp enough.”

I sharpened my teeth with a fang,
 A sharp fang from a lion’s maw,
 I begged the girl
 “OOO! Let’s run away to the forest.”

“No,” she laughed.
 “OOO, leave me alone,
 How can I run away to the forest?
 You don’t have any skulls...”)

The first stanza of this poem, which is also its refrain, closely resembles Glazkov’s “Avstraliiskaia Pliasovaia” (probably not included in the miscellany for this very reason). On the other hand, the poem’s romantic plot links it directly to Glazkov’s “Gauguin,” although Dolgin treats the subject with much more irony. In his interpretation,

Kruchenykh's scenario for a "puny and pale man" who "fell in love... with the primitive man's cutting teeth and gaze, animal-like in its sharpness" ends with a weird twist. As the title "Veselaia liudoedskaia" (The Song of the Merry Cannibals) already suggests, the girl will be gobbled up by her admirer:

Девушке я отрубил
Голову, и у меня
(Мясо ее я съел)
Есть теперь черепа.

(I chopped off the girl's
head, and now
(I devoured her flesh)
I have some skulls.)

The carefully calculated primitivist atmosphere characterizes the texts of the other participant – Vladimir Shekhtman, a student of the Moscow Theater Institute.⁶⁰ Here, for example, is a brief extract from his lengthy "Chernaia poema":

Черные ноги в крови костров.
Глаз накаленность любя,
Их охранял эбенно-суровый
Воин из племени С Е М Т Е Б Я.

(The black legs in the blood of bonfires.
The eyes throw out the flame.
They were guarded by the ebony-stern
Warrior from the tribe EAT-YOU-UP.)

Evgenii Bazhenov, a student of physics, who would later perish in World War II,⁶¹ supplies a quantity of "expressiveness." Here is his poem "Udar dymom":

Сонсад. Склянка – траве. Соль. Горит ли?
Вертолет. Пламясоль. Бег большим деревьям.
ВДР ВЗРЫВ. Дыма сад. Сто лет назад

(Sleepgarden. Bottle [in] the grass. Salt. Is it burning?
Helicopter. Flamesalt. Running [for] the big trees.
SDN EXPLOSION. Garden of smoke. A hundred years ago.)

As we see, Bazhenov consistently employs invented or distorted words, along with a

⁶⁰ Shekhtman would die from tuberculosis shortly after the end of World War II. Reported by Dolgin (Personal interview, 28 July 1996).

⁶¹ Reported by Dolgin (Personal interview, July 28, 1996).

wide spectrum of grammatical and semantical incongruities. The same devices – to an even larger extent – are displayed in his second poem, “Duruntul”:

А туманом и тьмой – призра. Я стою там, Шопенгауэр
И бывалисты землеглаз. Светлая, Она витала во
Мраке.

Мы окружили планету.

Четыркит, – Сказгауэн.

«БИБЛпред» – сказал бы.

Я ничего не сказал.

(Beyond fog and darkness – ghos. I am standing there.

Schopenhauer

And byvalists eartheye. Radiant, She hovered in

The dark.

We surrounded the planet.

Fourwhale, – Saidgauen.

“BIBLpred,” would be said.

I said nothing.)

Although the miscellany contains only two of Bazhenov’s pieces, their bold *zaum*’ qualities powerfully enhance the “Kruchenykhite” tone of the collection. In addition, certain allusions to Kruchenykh’s eschatological visions, particularly to his mysterious «Эф луч» (from “Utinoe gnezdyshko dumnykh slov,” 1914) – also found in Bazhenov’s poems – serve to emphasize this tone even further.

The other authors, for example, Evgenii Vedenskii, dutifully supply an element of textual “disharmony”:

А луна по небу
Плавала как рыба,
Ну а я там не был,
Но пошел туды бы.

(The moon in the sky
Swam like a fish,
True, I wasn’t there,
But I would not mind popping up thither.)

The goal is reached here primarily by means of the grammatically incorrect and folksy expression «туды бы» (instead of «туда бы»), which also gives the poem a certain quality of “primitivism.”

Even the most conservative of the participants, like Aleksei Ternovskii, who, according to his later confession, was slightly “upset” by Glazkov’s Kruchenykh-like

experiments,⁶² managed to make a certain contribution to the miscellany. In such cases the requisite effect is achieved with the help of the simple but powerful device of the misprint, so highly appreciated by the Futurists:⁶³

Я одолел дела идали,
 Сокрытые в житейском дыме.
 А те, кто дрались и страдали,
 Недаром названы святыми.
 (I overcame problems andistances,
 Concealed in the smoke of the daily grind.
 But those who fought and suffered
 Were rightly elevated to sainthood.)

This «идали» makes otherwise stylistically neutral lines quite *zaum* '-like, and therefore appropriate in the miscellany.

“Illogicality” also occupies a significant place in the collection. Although the most impressive examples are provided by Glazkov, the illogical productions of the other participants deserve to be mentioned as well. Here, for instance, is the miniature “Podrazhanie Ed. Poe”:

На берег тигра
 Вышли два Тибра.
 Я влез на забор.
 (Onto the bank of a tiger
 Two Tibers came out.
 I climbed the fence),

produced by Dolgin’s twelve-year-old cousin, Eric Zmoiro, who had also been invited to contribute to the miscellany.⁶⁴

Incidentally, the very fact of a child’s inclusion among the authors of an “adult” publication in turn is reminiscent of the Futurist practices. Kruchenykh’s collection “Porosiata” (1913) was allegedly written together with the eleven-year-old Zina V. Similarly, Khlebnikov insisted on including poems by the thirteen-year-old Militsa from Ukraine in the Futurist collection *Sadok sudei II* (1913).

⁶² Ternovskii, 82.

⁶³ In particular, the important role of misprints was discussed by Khlebnikov in “Nasha osnova” (1919).

⁶⁴ Zmoiro would later become an artist who worked in one of the Moscow theatres. Reported by Dolgin (Personal interview, July 28, 1996).

In fact, not only particular features, but the whole idea of creating a miscellany continued the Futurist tradition, as did the organization of a group. Apparently, it was inspired by the famous motto proclaimed in the first Futurist manifesto: “To stand on the rock of the word ‘we’ amidst the sea of boos and outrage.”⁶⁵ Of course, in 1912, when “*Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu*” was published, this statement was hardly perceived as controversial. In the 1930s, on the other hand, even the intention to organize an independent literary group had become extraordinarily dangerous; the OGPU had begun to persecute all kinds of discussion groups and circles, quite regardless of their actual activities, as early as 1928.⁶⁶

Despite all this, the “Nebyvalists” went beyond the mere formation of a literary group. They created a miscellany which challenged the literary establishment, and it was not just a bid for fame or notoriety, as was so often the case in pre-revolutionary Russia, but a direct defiance to the Soviet regime.⁶⁷ The collection’s aesthetic foundations (expressiveness, primitivism, illogicality, disharmony) directly opposed those of Socialist Realism (namely, “*narodnost*’,” “*partiinnost*’,” “*ideinnost*’”), and such open opposition was truly unprecedented at the beginning of the 1940s.⁶⁸ This makes the “Nebyvalist” miscellany – despite a measure of amateurishness – a document of considerable historical importance. Amidst total muteness, it was a loud message *urbi et orbi*: the avant-garde traditions were still alive and meaningful for a new generation of poets.

Equally importantly, this message was produced by members of a generation,

⁶⁵ David Burliuik et al, “A Slap In The Face Of Public Taste,” in *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, 52.

⁶⁶ A personal account of this matter can be found in the recollections of Dmitrii Likhachev. See his *Zametki i nabliudeniia*, Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1989, 98-99.

⁶⁷ For this very reason the temptation to create a miscellany was carefully avoided by another unique unofficial avant-garde organization – “Chinari,” which functioned in deep secrecy. See Iakov Druskin, “Chinari,” *Aurora*, no. 6 (1989): 107.

⁶⁸ It was believed for a long time that the only exception to this rule was a speech by Meyerhold at a meeting of theater producers that was chaired by Vyshinskii himself. This legend was created by Iu. Elagin (see his book *Temnyi genii*, New York: Izdatel’stvo imeni Chekhova, 1955), and was reiterated by even the best-informed Western scholars, such as Max Hayward: “... when Meyerhold, in a final gesture of despair, publicly refused to accept socialist realism in a speech in 1939, he was arrested and disappeared.” (*Writers In Russia. 1917-1978*, ed. and intr. Patricia Blake. San Diego: Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983, 63). But a shorthand record of Meyerhold’s speech, only recently published, shows that it “bears no resemblance to the defiant words that Yelagin sought to inscribe in legend.” (Edward Braun. *Meyerhold. A Rrevolution In Theatre*, 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1995, 295-97).

which, it is widely believed, was lost to the history of the Russian avant-garde, due to the political climate of the 1930s and the 1940s. Therefore, it is not surprising that in comparison with other avant-garde authors, who began writing in a less hostile environment, the “Nebyvalists” may seem somewhat weak and derivative. Still, they did not let the avant-garde tradition die out completely, although the whole venture involved an enormous risk.

Quite predictably, the appearance of the “Nebyvalist” miscellany provoked an official reaction that made “the sea of boos and outrage” envisioned by the Futurists in “*Poshchchina obshchestvennomu vkusu*” seem almost quaint. If anything had physically threatened the Futurists in the long-ago 1910s, it was only the wrath of a venerable old lady who accidentally showed up at one of their poetry readings. According to a vivid recollection of Aseev, this lady, angered by the escapades of the Futurists, attempted to hit Maiakovskii with the plug of a carafe, which he dodged with agility.⁶⁹ Now, however, the whole totalitarian state raised its hand against the “Nebyvalists.” This hand held something more substantial than the plug of a carafe, and it was not at all so easy to dodge.

Glazkov’s poetic chronicle, as well as the recollections of other “Nebyvalists,” recount the events that immediately followed the appearance of the miscellany: public meetings, where the activity of the group was examined and harshly condemned; articles in the Institute news sheet that accused the “Nebyvalists” of ideological subversion; expulsion from the Komsomol not only of the participants, but of their listeners and readers as well. Finally, Glazkov himself was expelled from the Institute as the ring-leader.

Yet these measures were amazingly mild by the standards of the time; Dolgin explained this to me by the fact that there was another student trial being held at Moscow State University at the same time, which received the bulk of official attention.⁷⁰ At any rate, this “mild” punishment enabled Glazkov a few years later to depict the entire episode in a surprisingly playful manner:

⁶⁹ Nikolai Aseev, “Pozitsii i ambitsii.” *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, t. 5, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964, 696-99.

⁷⁰ Personal interview, 26 July 1996.

Усякий стих правдивый мой
 Преследовался как крамола
 И Нина Б. за связь со мной
 Исключена из комсомола.

В самой Москве, белдня среди
 Оболтусы неумной бражки
 Антиглазковские статьи
 Печатали в многотиражке.

Мелькало много разных лиц.
 Под страхом исключения скоро
 От всех ошибок отреклись
 Последователи Глазкова.

Я поругался с дурачем,
 И был за это исключен.⁷¹

(My every true poem
 Was persecuted as seditious.
 And Nina B. was expelled from the Komsomol
 For contacts with me.

In Moscow itself, in broad daylight
 A stupid company of boobies
 Published the articles against Glazkov
 In the Institute news sheet.

It was a bustle there.
 From fear of being expelled
 The followers of Glazkov
 Renounced all their "mistakes."

I got into an argument with the fools,
 And was expelled for that very reason.)

The poet's confrontation with the authorities is philosophically treated here as «вечный спор поэта с чернью» (the perpetual argument between the poet and the mob), and the ideals of Futurism continue to be lauded to the skies:

Да здравствует небывализм,
 И я как основоположник!⁷²

⁷¹ Archive of N.N. Glazkov. Published (with changes) in *Izbrannoe*, 175. On the same events see the recollections of Aleksei Ternovskii: "It became known (informants could always be found) that at Nina Bondareva's place suspicious gatherings were held, where Glazkov's readings of his 'scandalous' poems were the highlight of the program. Nina Bondareva was expelled from the Komsomol, and Nikolai Glazkov from the Institute" (91-92).

(Long live Nebyvalism,
And me as its founder!)

It is interesting that Dolgin, who was the first reader and judge of the chronicle, turned out to be equally firm in this respect. If anything caused him to disagree with Glazkov, it was only the line “And me as its founder,” since Dolgin had pretensions to this honorific title himself. He insisted on an immediate correction, and the version: “And he who is a founder,” suggested by Glazkov, was eventually accepted.⁷³

This rivalry of the “founders” had reached such a pitch that Dolgin refused to show me the relevant correspondence by reason of its obscenity. This curious fact only confirms that the young poets realized perfectly well the importance of “Nebyvalism” in the history of Russian literature, an importance that fully justifies its “cheeky” name, although not in the sense in which it was originally intended. The aesthetics of “Nebyvalism” can hardly be perceived as “unprecedented”: its dependence on Futurism is too obvious. But, paradoxically, this very dependence, proclaimed in such a fearless manner, made “Nebyvalism” truly “nebyvalym” – in the context of the epoch.

“I AM A POET OF THE ERA YET TO COME...”

Finding himself on the street after the scandal with the “Nebyvalist” miscellany, Glazkov was striving to keep his spirits high, as his verse chronicle suggests:

Итак, плохи мои дела,
Была учебы карта бита.
Но Рита у меня была,
Рита, Рита, Рита...

⁷² Archive of N.N. Glazkov. Moreover, Glazkov was not discouraged from his attempts to produce poetic miscellanies as well. See his poem dedicated to the former Imaginist Mariengof written in 1943: «Поэты разных поколений, / А в то же время одного, / Мы соглашаемся без прений, / Что между нами никого. // Пишу об этом без злорадства, / Несчастью ль радоваться мне? / Будь все писатели умней, / Нам было лучше бы гораздо. // Меня б давным давно издали, / А вас почаше бы листали. / Все было б здорово, и стали / Мы с вами вместе издавать / Альманах» (The poets of different generations / But simultaneously of the same one, / We agree without debate / That there is nobody between us. / I am writing about this without any delight, / It is our misfortune. / If all writers were more clever / We would find ourselves in a much better position. / My poems would have been published long ago, / And your poems would be read more frequently. / Everything would be great, / And together we would produce / A miscellany; archive of N.N.Glazkov).

⁷³ Personal interview, July 26, 1996.

Студенты хуже школьников
 Готовились к зачетам.
 А мы всю ночь в Сокольниках...
 Зачеты нам за чертом!

Зимой метель как мельница,
 А летом тишь да гладь.
 Конечно, разумеется,
 Впрочем, надо полагать.⁷⁴

(So, things turned really bad,
 The card of studies was trumped.
 But I had Rita,
 Rita, Rita, Rita...

College students studied for exams
 Harder than schoolboys,
 But we spent all night in Sokol'niki park...
 To hell with the exams!

In winter the blizzard is like a windmill,
 But summer brings peace and tranquillity.
 Certainly, of course,
 However, one must suppose...)

Nevertheless, despite his characteristic nonchalance (well conveyed by the boisterous “Certainly, of course, however, one must suppose...”), Glazkov could not stop worrying about the uncertainty of his current situation. In the summer of the same year, 1940, he made an attempt to enter the Literary Institute, seeking support from the former Futurist Nikolai Aseev. This choice was by no means accidental: the canonization of Maiakovskii in 1935 had significantly strengthened Aseev’s official position. Aseev was recognized as Maiakovskii’s closest comrade-in-arms (“Of course / we have / Kol’ka / Aseev, / it’s true. / He can. / He’s got a grip / like me...”⁷⁵), and this honorary status enabled him to recover from the shock of LEF’s demise and Maiakovskii’s suicide. Now, Aseev’s main goal was not so much to dissociate himself with his Futurist past, but to rehabilitate it in the eyes of Soviet readers. These efforts became evident in his narrative poem “Maiakovskii nachinaetsia,” on which he worked from 1935 to 1940.⁷⁶ Although

⁷⁴ *Izbrannoe*, 341.

⁷⁵ Maiakovskii, “Iubileinoe” (1924). Trans. by Herbert Marshal, in *Mayakovsky*, 243-244.

⁷⁶ It is interesting that Aseev’s public announcement about his work on this narrative poem did not appear until Maiakovskii had been officially pronounced “the best, the most talented poet of our Soviet era.” See

Aseev still had to characterize Futurism in rather negative terms,⁷⁷ he recalled its founders – Burliuk, Khlebnikov, and Kruchenykh – with respect and sympathy, giving them their due to the best of his abilities.⁷⁸ Not surprisingly, Aseev did not stay indifferent to the fate of the “Neofuturist” Glazkov, extending a helping hand to the young poet. In his verse chronicle Glazkov recollects this gesture with a mixture of irony and gratitude:

Безынститутъе как пробел,
И должен отыграться я...
Тогда Асеев как Флобер
Мне дал рекомендацию.⁷⁹

(Being out of college is like a gap,
And I had to play it back...
Then Aseev, acting like Flaubert,
Gave me a recommendation.)

Aseev’s recommendation proved to be effective, and Glazkov was admitted to the Literary Institute, where the poetic seminars were conducted at that time by Aseev himself, the former Constructivist Sel’vinskii, and the former LEF member Kirsanov. Although these poets had themselves given up any serious experimentation, they were kindly disposed towards the disgraced Glazkov. He was officially registered for Kirsanov’s seminar, but frequently showed up in Sel’vinskii’s class, which he would later characterize as “the most interesting” one.⁸⁰ Both seminars were regularly mentioned in Glazkov’s diary, known under the title “letopis’ ” (annals).⁸¹ The notes in these “annals”

on this matter I. Shaitanov, *V sodruzhestve svetil. Poeziia Nikolaia Aseeva*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1985, 332.

⁷⁷ «Искусство, / разобранное на пружинки. / Железо империи евшая ржа. / В вольерах искусства прыжки и ужимки / «взбешенного мелкого буржуа» (Art / disassembled into nuts and bolts; / rust that corroded the iron of the empire. / In the enclosure of art / leaps and grimaces of “an enraged petty-bourgeois; in *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, t. 3, 415). The phrase in the quotation marks is an excerpt from Lenin’s article “On leftist childishness and petty-bourgeois attitude.”

⁷⁸ See the chapters “Proba golosa,” “Otsy i deti,” and “Khlebnikov.”

⁷⁹ *Izbrannoe*, 341. Lili Brik would comment on these verse in her letter to Glazkov of March 24, 1942: “The line about Aseev – Flaubert is very funny, and also respectful, and rancorous! We enjoyed it thoroughly...” (Archive of N.N. Glazkov).

⁸⁰ In Glazkov’s autobiography, which he dictated many years later to David Samoilov, he would recall that “the most interesting was Sel’vinskii’s seminar. After the class, we read poems to each other and flew away beyond the bounds.” (In *Samye moi stikhi*, 91).

⁸¹ Kept in the archive of N.N. Glazkov.

were, as a rule, extremely laconic, but sometimes, Glazkov elaborated them a little. One example, “Kirsanov’s seminar: – Down with Tvardovskii!,” gives us a clue about the topic of the classroom discussion. It was, most likely, mutual dissatisfaction with the traditional aesthetics.

In addition to his mentors, all of whom were directly linked to the Russian avant-garde of the past, and apparently still had some zeal for it, Glazkov met at the Literary Institute young poets close to him in spirit. As he put it in his verse chronicle,

А были люди стоящие
В Литинституте том.⁸²

(And there were worthwhile people
In that Literary Institute.)

Later Glazkov would decipher this statement in his narrative poem “Po glazkovskim mestam” (1946):

А рядом мир литинститутский,
где люди прыгали из окон.
И где котировались Слуцкий,
Кульчицкий, Кауфман и Коган.⁸³

(And nearby there was the world of the Literary Institute,
Where people jumped out from windows,
And where were valued Slutskii,
Kul’chitskii, Kaufman, and Kogan.)

Here Glazkov lists the most talented of his peers, wittily emphasizing their close affinity through sound repetition: KOtirovalis’ – SlutsKII – KUl’chitsKII – Kaufman – KOgan. Each of these peers would occupy a respectable position in Soviet poetry: Boris Slutskii and David Kaufman (who would adopt the pen-name Samoilov) are justly considered among the most important poets of their generation. Well-deserved fame would be bestowed upon Mikhail Kul’chitskii and Pavel Kogan who perished during World War II. But, even surrounded by these brilliant talents, Glazkov managed to remain the primary figure. Here, for example, is Boris Slutskii’s account of those years:

When I recollect the eve of World War II, the Moscow Literary Institute, the seminars and the very infrequent readings of youth poetry, Glazkov’s poems are

⁸² Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

⁸³ *Avtoportret*, 165.

all but the strongest and most memorable impression of that time... These poems were characterized by the absolute naturalness of poetic expression, aphoristic quality, and as the result, all literary Moscow repeated Glazkov's lines by heart.⁸⁴

Slutskii's memoirs are further corroborated by another schoolmate:

At the end of 1940, when I transferred from the Department of History of IFLI to the Moscow Literary Institute, I learned right away that the place had two recognized geniuses: Mikhail Kul'chitskii and Nikolai Glazkov.⁸⁵

Kul'chitskii, however, was not just the rival, but also the closest friend of Glazkov. In his verse chronicle Glazkov introduces Kul'chitskii with unreserved affection:

Ловящий взглядом все вокруг,
Схвативший футуризм,
Он был мой самый близкий друг
Литинститута из.⁸⁶

(His eye caught everything around him,
He captured Futurism,
He was my closest friend
From the Literary Institute.)

This friendship was based on common literary preferences. Like Glazkov, Kul'chitskii showed a strong inclination for verbal play, which can be encountered virtually in all of his poems. At the same time, Kul'chitskii's "Futurism" was rather different from that of Glazkov. Definitely, the former was much more tolerable for the authorities, since it was effectively compensated by Kul'chitskii's profound loyalty to the communist ideals, which he ardently proclaimed on every occasion.⁸⁷

К кругосветному небу
Нас мучит любовь:
Боев за коммуны
Мы смолodu ищем.
За границей
В каждой нише

⁸⁴ "Litso poeta" in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 15.

⁸⁵ Richi Dostian, "Poet izustmoi slavy," in *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁶ Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

⁸⁷ Only in his private letters did Kul'chitskii allow himself an "unprotected" Futurism. See, for example, a short poem from his letter to Glazkov of August 24, 1941: «Фугас погас / И ни фи́га – с. / Ась?» (The photocopy of the letter is published in *Vospominania o Nikolae Glazkove*, 197.)

По нищему.
Там небо в крестах самолетов
Кладбищем,
И земля вся в крестах
Пограничных столбов.⁸⁸

(Love to the round-the-world sky
Torments us:
Since our youth we are eager
To fight for commune.
In foreign countries there are beggars
On every corner;
The sky there is all in airplanes' crosses –
Like a cemetery.
And the earth is all in crosses
Of boundary posts.)

Not surprisingly, a significant number of Kul'chitskii's poems were considered "publishable": several of them even appeared in prestigious literary journals.⁸⁹ The above-cited piece, in particular, was printed in the literary monthly *Molodaia gvardia*, along with some of Kul'chitskii's other poems, imbued with the same pathos.⁹⁰ Such pathos, as one can already discern, was absolutely foreign to the young Glazkov,⁹¹ who dared to ridicule it in his parody on Kul'chitskii. The parody was based on the latter's best-known poem – "Samoe takoe," published (in extracts) in the literary monthly *Oktiabr'*.⁹² In this poem the author places himself before a hypothetical choice: «Но если бы / кто-нибудь мне сказал: / сожги стихи – / коммунизм начнется...» (But if someone / told me: / Burn your poems – / And communism will begin...), expressing an

⁸⁸ In *Sovetskie poety pavshie na Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1965, 365-366.

⁸⁹ Of course, the publication of Kul'chitskii's poems proceeded grudgingly. See his letter to a friend in Khar'kov: "How they printed them! My poem: out of eight chapters they published three fragments from three chapters and the end. And it was all accompanied with such a jackal howl..." Cited in Iurii Boldyrev, "Vydaiu sebia za samogo sebia..." (in Boris Slutskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 1, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1991, 13).

⁹⁰ *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 2 (1941): 85.

⁹¹ Dolgin recalls that at the very beginning of their friendship (in 1939), he asked Glazkov with what philosophy he sympathized? The answer was that the only philosophy he stuck to was the philosophy of wittiness (Dolgin's letter to me of July 30, 1999). See also Glazkov's lines about himself, which he would write in 1943: «Конгениален был он трохи. / Но не воспел знамен кармин. / Его стихи за эти крохи / Бросать не надобно в камин.» (He was a little bit congenial. / But did not glorify red banners. / For such a small slip / Do not throw his verse in a fireplace; *Izbrannoe*, 393.)

⁹² *Oktiabr'*, no. 2 (1941): 112.

immediate readiness to put his talent (as well as his life) on the altar of the world revolution:

И за то,
чтоб, как в русские,
в небеса
французская девушка
смотрела спокойно,
согласился б ни строчки
в жисть
не писать...

.
А потом взял бы
и написал
так-о-о-е...⁹³

(And for a French girl
to be able to look in the sky
as calmly as [we look] in the Russian sky,
I would agree not to write
a single line
in all my life.

.
And then I would
write at once
su-u-u-uch a thing.)

In his “Parodiia na Mikhaila Kul’chitskogo” (1942) Glazkov converts this enthusiastic pledge (although spiced with a note of humor) into a lampoon:

Если бы кто-нибудь мне сказал:
«Водку не пей – коммунизм начнется»,
Я только бы губы свои покусал,
Я б только подумал: «Мне это зачтется».

И чтобы, как в русское небо,
Французские девушки смотрели ввысь,
Я б не пил, и не пил, и не пил,
А потом бы не выдержал и выпил за коммунизм!⁹⁴

(If someone told me:
“Don’t drink vodka – and communism will begin,”
I would only bite my lips,
I would only think: “This will go on my record.”

⁹³ In *Sovetskie poety pavshie na Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, 375–377.

⁹⁴ *Izbrannoe*, 60.

And for the French girls to look up in the sky
 As if it were Russian sky,
 I would abstain from drinking, and abstain, and abstain,
 And then I would break, and would take a shot for communism!)

Certainly, Glazkov's lack of respect for the ideological convictions of the time, such as the belief in the coming worldwide revolution, made him unique even among his closest friends. As Boris Slutskii would cautiously put it later, "Glazkov was radically different from his peers. We had the same teachers, but we learned from them different things."⁹⁵ This account contains one inaccuracy: the teachers were not the same either. While Kul'chitskii and Slutskii were primarily influenced by the late Maiakovskii (e.g., Slutskii's poem "Ia byl uchenikom u Maiakovskogo"⁹⁶), Glazkov, as we have already seen, was much more interested in Kruchenykh's experimentation, although his enthusiasm for *zaum'* was eventually to subside. By 1940 Glazkov had almost ceased writing absurdist poems, producing only one ("Golub'") in an entire year. Around this time he became fascinated by the verse of Khlebnikov, whom he pronounced his primary teacher in a distich written in 1940⁹⁷:

Был не от мира Велемир,
 Но он открыл мне двери в мир.⁹⁸

(Velemir was out of this world,
 But he opened the door to the world for me.)

Of course, Glazkov can hardly be termed the only young writer who was influenced by Khlebnikov at the beginning of the 1940s. Another such poet was Kseniia Nekrasova (1912-1958), who was also a student in the Literary Institute (she was in Aseev's poetic seminar) and a good acquaintance of Glazkov. Nekrasova's poetic affinity with Khlebnikov can be seen in her predilection for neologisms, but, first of all, in her

⁹⁵ "Litso poeta," 15.

⁹⁶ «Я был учеником у Маяковского / Не потому, что краски растирал. / А потому, что среди ржания конского / Я человеческим голосом орал. / Не потому, что сиживал на парте я, / Копируя манеры, рост и пыл, / А потому, что в сорок третьем в партию / И в сорок первом в армию вступил» (I was Maiakovskii's apprentice / Not because I mixed paints, / But because in the midst of horse neighing / I yelled with a human voice. / Not because I used to sit at student desk, / Copying his manners, height, and fervor, / But because I joined the [Communist] party in the year forty-three / And joined the army in the year forty-one; in *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 1, 37).

⁹⁷ Interestingly enough, all of Glazkov's mentors were once members of the "Gruppa druzei Khlebnikova," which existed in the 1920s and early 1930s.

⁹⁸ *Izbrannoe*, 423.

childlike perception of the world, which she depicted in seemingly artless poems full of bright colors, freshness, and beauty. Although Nekrasova's poems certainly looked unusual against the stiff background of Stalinist Neo-classicism, their "optimistic" tone, as well as exploration of working class themes (she had once worked in a large factory), somehow counterbalanced this "strangeness" in the eyes of the Soviet authorities, enabling Nekrasova to publish from 1937 onward.⁹⁹ In comparison with Nekrasova's poems, Glazkov's verses seemed considerably more somber and ambiguous in tone, as well as much more "formalistic" in style.

Glazkov was entranced by Khlebnikov's formal innovations; not surprisingly, the poetic devices of neologisms, paronomasia, compound rhymes, and inversions, so typical of Khlebnikov's poetry, soon abounded in the young poet's writings. One of the poems from 1940 features Glazkov's most felicitous neologism:

Я иду по улице,
Мир перед глазами.
И слова стихуются
Совершенно сами.¹⁰⁰

(I walk along the street,
The world is before my eyes.
And words assemble into poetic lines
Absolutely by themselves.)

Khlebnikov's major innovation, compound and paronomastic rhymes,¹⁰¹ also became a trademark of Glazkov's style. Some of the poems written in 1940 constitute

⁹⁹ On Kseniia Nekrasova see her book in the poetic series *Samye moi stikhi*, Moscow: Slovo, 1995, which contains, besides her own poems, some biographical materials, as well as memoirs on the poet. Poetic indebtedness to Khlebnikov can also be found in the verses of the underground poet Alik Rivin (1915?-1942?), especially in "Kazn' Khlebnikova" (1940) and in "Poema goriashchikh rybok," published in *Neue Russische Literatur*, Almanach 1, (1978): 48-51 and in *Novyi mir*, no. 1 (1994): 156-161, respectively. However, the small number of Rivin's texts that has survived does not allow us to draw any firm conclusions on this matter. About Rivin also see K. Kuzminskii and G. Kovalev, *The Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry*, Newtonville, Mass: Oriental Research Partners, 1980-86, 47-67; G.A. Levinton, "Zabytyi poet," *Zvezda*, no. 11 (1989): 178-193, and "Iz chernovikov A. Rivina" in *Poeziia i zhivopis'*. Sbornik trudov pamiati N.I. Khardzhieva, Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2000, 736-747.

¹⁰⁰ *Samye moi stikhi*, 12. In some instances, however, Glazkov followed Khlebnikov too closely. In particular, his neologisms "tvoriteli" and "vtoriteli" («Дело не в печатанье, не в литепе, / – Не умру, так проживу и без: / На творителей и вторителей / Мир разделен весь», *Izbrannoe*, 458) look like paraphrases of Khlebnikov's coinage "tvoriane" ("Ladimir").

¹⁰¹ See Nikolai Khardzhiev, "Maiakovskii i Khlebnikov," in *Stat'i ob avangarde v 2 tomakh*, t. 2. Moscow: RA, 1997, 79-80.

elaborate puns, which defy any sensible translation:

Державин
По гроб
Держал вин
Погреб.

От:

Она права,
А я упряма,
Она ушла направо.
А мой путь прям.

От:

Метель
Ревет в ожесточенье,
Мять ель –
Ее прямое назначенье.¹⁰²

As Glazkov's "annals" suggest, Khlebnikov's poems were at this time a kind of reference book for him.¹⁰³ The young poet's acute feeling of kinship with Khlebnikov was obviously encouraged by the fact that he showed an amazing resemblance to his idol even in his physical appearance and manner, a fact confirmed by many people who knew both poets, including Glazkov's mentors from the Literary Institute and later, Lili Brik.¹⁰⁴ There were also some similarities in the interests of the two poets (especially, mathematics) as well as in certain eccentric habits, which Glazkov apparently cultivated.¹⁰⁵

Glazkov's reading list for 1940, carefully recorded in his "annals," also included Maiakovskii's collected writings, Aseev's "Maiakovskii nachinaetsia," Kamenskii's

¹⁰² *Izbrannoe*, 486, 484, 485, respectively.

¹⁰³ Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

¹⁰⁴ See Dolgin, "V sorokovye gody," 104.

¹⁰⁵ In one of his early poems, Glazkov refers to himself as "математик Глазков Николай" (a mathematician Glazkov Nikolai; archive of N.N. Glazkov). He also tried to predict important historical events through numerological calculations, obviously following the well-known example of Khlebnikov, who by these means had supposedly predicted the year of the October Revolution in Russia. None of Glazkov's attempts of this kind produced any impressive results, although he did foresee Hitler's eventual suicide as early as 1941, when there was no reason to believe in such an outcome. See the following poem by Glazkov: "Может быть, он того и не хочет, / Может быть, он к тому не готов, / Но мне кажется, что обязательно кончит / Самоубийством Гитлер Адольф" (Probably, he does not want it, / Probably, he is not ready for it, / But it seems to me that Adolf Hitler / Will certainly commit suicide; *Izbrannoe*, 355).

“Zhizn’ s Maiakovskim,” and Katanian’s “Rasskazy o Maiakovskom,” – all of which demonstrate Glazkov’s strong determination to learn as much as possible about the history of Futurism. Simultaneously, Glazkov was assiduous in his efforts to establish contact with any surviving participants of the avant-garde movement, who were not associated with his alma mater. In 1941 Glazkov paid a visit to Boris Pasternak, which he described in a poem most likely composed immediately after the event:

Он стал хвалить Шекспира и Толстого,
Как песнопевцев самого простого,
Самого в литературе дельного,
Что не забудется в течение лет.

– В жизни, – он говорил, – лишь одни понедельники,
А воскресений почти что нет.

Никого не надо эпатировать,
Пишите так, как будто для себя,
И не важно, будут аплодировать
Или от негодованья завопят.

Впрочем, лучше вовсе не писать,
А заниматься более достойными вещами,
А поэзия – не детский сад.
Посему и не хожу на совещанья.¹⁰⁶

(He began to praise Shakespeare and Tolstoi
As bards of the simplest things,
Of the most substantial in the literature,
That will not be forgotten in the years to come.

Life – he said – consists of Mondays only,
And has almost no Sundays.

You must not try to shock anyone.
Write like you are doing it for yourself.
And it does not matter whether you will get applause,
Or will be yelled at indignantly.

In fact, it is better not to write at all,
But get involved in more decent activities,
And poetry is not kindergarden,
Therefore, I do not attend official meetings.)

As one can see, Glazkov carefully reconstructs Pasternak’s monologue, without adding

¹⁰⁶ *Izbrannoe*, 47.

any personal comments, which was rather unusual for him.

It was done, most probably, out of the deepest respect for Pasternak's opinion, although Glazkov might have strongly disagreed with some of his points. "You must not try to shock anyone," – "Neofuturist" Glazkov could hardly take this recommendation seriously. On the other hand, Pasternak's advise "to write like you are doing it for yourself. / And it does not matter whether you will get applause, / Or will be yelled at indignantly" must have sounded encouraging to the young poet, who had had no opportunity to pursue the normal poetic career.

Of course, Pasternak's advice was not quite personal in contrast to the encouragement, which Glazkov received from the other participants of the avant-garde movement, whom he was able to reach. It was, first of all, Aleksei Kruchenykh, whom, as the "annals" indicate, Glazkov met in 1941, and who willingly recognized the young poet as his follower.¹⁰⁷ It was also Osip Brik, whose seminars (at the Moscow School of Law) Glazkov attended in 1940, and with whom he managed to maintain a nurturing and long-lasting relationship.¹⁰⁸ The most effective support, however, came from Lili Brik, Maiakovskii's lifetime Muse. They got acquainted at the end of 1940, and the date of the meeting – December 21 – was marked in the "annals" with an especial solemnity. Glazkov also offered a more detailed account of the event:

One night (it was December 21, 1940) Kul'chitskii introduced me to Lili Brik. Half a year earlier, an excellent poet Iaroslav Smeliakov had seen me in the club of the Union of Soviet Writers and told Lili Brik that this was a genius – Glazkov. Thus, Brik has been aware of my existence. Lili Brik approved my poetry.¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, Glazkov, who never displayed excessive modesty, showed in this particular instance obvious discretion. Lili Brik did not just "approve" his poems, but truly admired

¹⁰⁷ See the memoirs of a mutual friend, Lidiia Libedinskaia, "I ego zapishut v knigu nebyvalykh stikhotvortsev" in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 220-221.

¹⁰⁸ See Glazkov's poem "Na smert' O.M. Brika" (1945): «Плохо нам всем, / Что ни путь, то тупик. / Что ни ступень, то капкан: / Умер Осип Максимович Брик – / Последний из могикан.» (We are all doing badly, / There are dead ends in every direction, / Every step turns into a trap / Died Osip Maksimovich Brik – / The last of Mohicans; archive of N.N. Glazkov).

¹⁰⁹ See Dolgin, 99. Dolgin, however, offers another version of the first encounter of Glazkov and Lili Brik: "...Soon in her [Brik's] home appeared Slutskii. Among other things, he said to her: 'You know, we have a freak among us. Strange personality, but his poems are quite talented.' 'Why! Bring him here. I am curious to meet him.' Thus, Glazkov was introduced to Lili Brik. And – to the astonishment of everybody – ousted all others from the hostess' attention." *Ibid.*, 99.

most of them. Not accidentally, she immediately took a very active part in Glazkov's life. Because of her energetic efforts, the poet's "samizdat" activity did not die away, but, on the contrary, flourished. The important hallmark of this activity was the hand-written collection of Glazkov's poetry *Vokzal*, which they put together shortly before the war.¹¹⁰ Unlike the "Nebyvalist" miscellany, *Vokzal* existed only in a single copy, which was always kept in Brik's apartment, as an item of considerable value.¹¹¹ Futurist lithographic editions, illustrated by Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich and others, were obviously the models for Glazkov's *Vokzal*. Typewriting was mixed with handwriting, and the illustrations were done by the well-known avant-garde artists Alexandr Tyshler (who also provided a portrait of young Glazkov) and David Shterenberg, Lili Brik's close friends, both of whom had been persecuted by that time as "formalists."¹¹² Some illustrations were done by Vasilii Katanian, Brik's current husband, and by Glazkov himself, who also made the cover for the collection. This, in turn, was reminiscent of the Futurists' practices: enough to recall Burluik's illustrations to *Sadok sudei I* (1910), or his litographs in *Trebnik troikh* (1913) and *Moloko kobylyts* (1914), as well as Kruchenykh's collages in *Vselenskaia voina* (1916).

With a few exceptions, the poems by Glazkov which were included in *Vokzal* do not overlap with his selection in the "Nebyvalist" miscellany, at least in its surviving copy. Obviously, these two collections had different goals: if the latter focused on Glazkov's most "Kruchenykhite" production, *Vokzal* tried to present the poet in development. It contained poems from 1933 to 1941, carefully selected by Lili Brik. Here is, for instance, a poem of 1933:

¹¹⁰ Although the collection was compiled for the most part at the first half of 1941, it was later supplemented with several poems written during and after the war. Previously, in 1940, Glazkov's friend from the Pedagogical Institute Aleksei Ternovskii assembled another Glazkov's samizdat collection, typewritten and bounded with the help of his father, who lived in the city of Kazan' (See Ternovskii, 88-89). This collection – Nikolai Glazkov. *Stikhotvoreniia*. Kazan', 1940 – is kept in the poet's archive. It contained some poems, which were not included (most likely for political reasons) in *Vokzal*, although they certainly deserved attention. Here is one of them: «Мне наплевать, как ни томись мы, / На дебри воплей и оваций. / Суть подлинного оптимизма / В любой трясине целоваться» (I don't give a damn, no matter how long we anguish. / About the mayhem of howls and ovations. / The essence of a true optimism / Is to kiss each other in any swamp.)

¹¹¹ After the death of Lili Brik in 1978, Katanian presented *Vokzal* to Glazkov's son, N.N.Glazkov, in whose archive it is kept now.

¹¹² See Golomstock, 108.

Рекламы города цветут
 Движеньем и огнем.
 Четыре девушки идут
 И думают о нем.

А почему не обо мне,
 Чем хуже я его?!
 Ничем не хуже, но оне
 Не смыслят ничего.¹¹³

(City billboards and signs are glowing
 With movement and light.
 Four girls stroll along
 And think about that guy.

But why not about me,
 Am I any worse than he is?!
 Not a bit worse, but these girls
 Don't know a thing about it.)

Certainly, the poet's aggressive self-praise brings to mind some of the Futurists' well-known confessions and, especially, Maiakovskii's famous lines: "I go by – handsome, twenty-two-year-old..."¹¹⁴ but it is far from being a mere imitation. Although it is one of Glazkov's earliest pieces (composed when he was only fourteen), it already displays a "Glazkovian" blend of naiveté and self-irony, which would become characteristic of his mature works.

Here is another poem from *Vokzal*, written in 1936:

Старушка, та пряталась в тряпки из ваты,
 Да изредка нюхала бром.
 А внук ее шел в социал-демократы
 И ставил вопросы ребром.¹¹⁵

(The old lady, she hid among old rags
 And sniffed bromine from time to time.
 Meanwhile, her grandson joined the social-democrats
 And put the questions point-blank.)

This early poem is already "Glazkovian" as well. An important ideological subject is approached in a brief and simplistic fashion, which inevitably creates the effect of

¹¹³ *Izbrannoe*, 13.

¹¹⁴ "Oblako v shtanakh" (1915). Trans. by Herbert Marshall, in *Mayakovsky*, 99.

¹¹⁵ *Samye moi stikhi*, 3.

mockery. This impression is further emphasized by the awkwardness of the last line, since the idiom «ставить вопрос ребром» requires a more specific context. The same inclination to involve ideological clichés in ambiguous play would become more pronounced in Glazkov's later poems, such as "Kolosia podkosilo koleso" (1939), "Ballada" (1939), and "Golub'" (1940), where he touched upon the theme of Soviet militia. All of these pieces, as well as Glazkov's "Manifestoes" were included in *Vokzal*, representing the "Nebyvalist" period of his work. Among the most recent accomplishments the collection featured the above-cited "Ja idu po ulitse..," "Derzhavin..," and the like, which demonstrated Glazkov's growing commitment to Futurism. Not accidentally, one of the drawings which illustrated *Vokzal* shows a sphinx with a balloon emerging from his mouth that reads: "More healthy Soviet Futurism!" The slogan, however, was deeply ironic: most of Glazkov's verses had little to do with "healthy Soviet Futurism." On the contrary, they exemplified the most daring "formalism," being not just aesthetically, but also politically defiant. This piece is, probably, the riskiest in *Vokzal*:

Слава – шкура барабана,
 Каждый колоти в нее,
 А история покажет,
 Кто дегенеративнее.¹¹⁶

(Fame is a drum,
 Everybody can beat it,
 But history will show,
 Who is more degenerate!)

As one can see, the adjective "degenerate" alludes to "regular" Soviet labels for avant-garde art, such as "art of decay and putrefaction" and the like, which Glazkov now lobbed back at the authorities. Simultaneously, this very adjective carried an inevitable reminder of the notorious "Exhibition of Degenerate Art" arranged in 1937 by Hitler and his allies.¹¹⁷ Glazkov was implicitly comparing his own Soviet persecutors to the Nazis, and in 1940, when the poem was written, such a comparison might have cost the young author dearly.

This time, however, everything went relatively smoothly, and Glazkov's

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁷ See Golomstock, 102-106.

escapades only contributed to his fame among his peers at the Literary Institute, where he continued to study until the war with Germany broke out in June 1941. Like many other poets, Glazkov immediately responded to this tragic event, although he did it in his very own way, as his poem “Molitva” (1941) testifies:

Господи! Вступи за Советы,
Сохрани страну от высших рас,
Потому что все Твои заветы
Нарушает Гитлер чаще нас.¹¹⁸

(Good Lord! Stand up for the Soviets,
Save the country from higher races,
Because all your commandments
Hitler violates more often than we do.)

The poem’s genre – the genre of the prayer – became practically extinct in the Soviet period, notorious for its militant atheism, but it was not its genre that makes the poem so strikingly unconventional.¹¹⁹ Its most scandalous feature was the usage of the specific grammatical form – “more often,” quite unexpected in this context. It establishes an affinity between Hitler and Soviet leaders, who, as it turns out, differ from each other only by the degree of their injustice. Apparently, this was Glazkov’s well-considered idea, which might help us to understand the important moment in his biography – his desperate decision to escape military service by all possible means. Such an attitude towards “every citizen’s patriotic duty” was very untypical of his generation, and constituted a sharp contrast to the attitude of Glazkov’s closest friends – Slutskii, Kaufman, Kogan, and Kul’chitskii, all of whom were bursting to go into action. While they (as well as almost all of their schoolmates) went to the front, Glazkov managed to get an exemption from the draft. He was evacuated from Moscow and sent to the city of

¹¹⁸ *Samye moi stikhi*, 29.

¹¹⁹ According to Dolgin, Glazkov was a devoted Christian, although not an orthodox one. See, for instance, his poem «Прихожу я к монахам, / Говорю, как поэт: / Вы, ничтожные, как Монахо, / Знайте, что Бога нет. // А потом прихожу к атеистам, / Говорю как пророк: / Там, на небе мгlistом, / Есть Господь Бог» (I come to monks / And tell them as a poet: / You, worthless as Monacho, / Know that the Lord does not exist. // And then I come to atheists, / And tell them as a prophet: / Know that there, in the cloudy sky, / The Lord does exist; *Samye moi stikhi*, 25). At the same time Glazkov allowed himself some statements that were absolutely inappropriate from the standpoint of the Church, but perfectly in the spirit of the Futurist notorious declarations. See, for example, «Я, Николай Чудотворец, / Император страниц, / Хочу не кому-нибудь вторить, / А истину установить» (I, Saint Nicholas, / The emperor of pages, / I do not want to repeat anybody, / But to establish the truth; *Ibid.*, 24).

Gorkii,¹²⁰ where he enrolled in the local Pedagogical Institute. Despite the turmoil of the first months of the war, he did not abandon poetry. In Gorkii Glazkov wrote the verse chronicle “Stepan Kumyrskii,” in which he recounted the entire torturous history of the creation of the “Nebyvalist” miscellany. Glazkov designated the chronicle’s chapters as “parokhody” (steam-boats), imitating, most probably, Khlebnikov’s *Deti vydry* (1911-1913), in which the chapters were called “parusa” (sails). Longing for a feedback, Glazkov mailed the chronicle as well as his other new poems to Lili Brik, who had been evacuated to the city of Perm’. Glazkov completely trusted her literary taste, expressing in his letters the reiterated request: “If you don’t like anything in the poem <...>, you may mark it out or replace it with other words. Just keep me posted about the changes you have made, I need to know what is right.”¹²¹

Lili Brik, in turn, sent Glazkov elaborate answers with a meticulous examination of his poetic work. In particular, in her letter of March 24, 1942, Brik reported that she had received two “steam-boats” of “Stepan Kumyrskii” and provided a detailed analysis of them, stanza by stanza. Although she did not like certain fragments, she enthusiastically approved the rest of the poem, thoroughly savoring its most felicitous lines. In addition, Brik offered some general reflections on Glazkov’s poetry:

<...> I asked Osia,¹²² why did I like your poetry so much. He answered: “Because this is the music of the Shah of Persia.” This is amazingly true!

The Shah of Persia attended the opera *Kniaz’ Igor* in Bol’shoi Theater, and when asked which act he liked the most, he replied: “The one that was played when the lights were still on and the curtain down.” That was, when the musicians still tuned up their instruments. Osip Maksimovich meant that your poetry – a vast, marvelous orchestra, with various wonderful instruments in the hands of brilliant musicians (who are – you). When they tune up, they (you) improvise, often splendidly, or play sketchily something composed earlier, or suddenly put on an excerpt from *Carmen*. But this is not yet a finished symphony.

I don’t like technically finished works. I like when there is space left for my imagination. At the same time, something finished always seems insufficient to me <...>¹²³

¹²⁰ See Glazkov’s poetic reaction to this event: «И горькуировался я: / Эвакуировался в Горький.» (*Izbrannoe*, 363).

¹²¹ The letter of November 17, 1941. (Archive of N.N. Glazkov).

¹²² Osip Brik.

¹²³ This and all other Brik’s letters are kept in the archive of N.N. Glazkov.

Being unable to communicate freely (in the wartime, all letters were to be checked by censors), Lili Brik resorted to the help of a parable that could be easily deciphered by her addressee. Her mention of “the music of the Shah of Persia” was an allusion to Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, which contained a harsh critique of the French court through the candid eyes of a foreigner. As one can see, Brik wittily substituted the original entourage by the domestic one (Bol’shoi Theater, etc.), which allowed her to express her skeptical attitude towards officially favored art, such as, in particular, Borodin’s *Kniaz’ Igor* – “an example of the national heroic epic in music.”¹²⁴ She contraposed this kind of art to Glazkov’s poetry – playful, ironic, spontaneous,¹²⁵ approvingly pointing to the fragmented quality of his work, which was also at variance with the governing canon of Neo-classicism.

Indeed, Glazkov used to define his narrative poems as “fragmented” or “mosaic,” since most of their stanzas could be easily rearranged, or even used as independent pieces.¹²⁶ At the same time, Glazkov showed a strong predilection for short poetic forms, producing a significant number of two- and four-line poems, which he called “kratkostishiiia.” These features, however, distinguished Glazkov’s poetry not only from official art, but also from his direct predecessors,¹²⁷ and this, most likely, made his work especially valuable to Lili Brik. Although she always emphasized Glazkov’s Futurist roots,¹²⁸ she was happy to affirm that he had gradually overcome his earlier dependence

¹²⁴ *Muzikal’naia entsiklopediia*, Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1973, t. 1, 541.

¹²⁵ Interestingly, Glazkov managed to write in the same spirit even when he dealt with the theme of war. Here is an extract from his narrative poem “Mirovaia dur’ ” (1942), where he skillfully used the reversed “Khlebnikovian” syntax: «Времени массу, труда и учебы – / Разве это не глупо? – / Безжалостно тратить, чтобы / Людей превращать в трупы? // К тому же это напрасный труд; / Люди и без того умрут!» (Tons of time, work, and drills – / Isn’t that silly? – / To waste pitilessly in order / To turn people into corpses. // Besides, these are vain efforts: / People will die anyway!; *Samye moi stikhi*, 40).

¹²⁶ One of Glazkov’s samizdat books that he presented to Lili Brik in 1944 contained only quatrains, many of which originally were the parts of the larger works. The inscription on the book reads «Лиле Юрьевне Брик / вручает автор сию тетрадь в вечное. / Аминь. / 44 г.» (To Lili Yurievna Brik. / The author hands in this notebook for eternal [peruse]. / Amen / year 44; archive of N.N. Glazkov). See also *Avtoportret*, 131.

¹²⁷ See on this matter B. Samov “Vechnyi rab svoei svobody” in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 437-438.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Brik’s letter of July 25, 1942: “Kolen’ka! We had begun to worry about you, when we received the letter with the third ‘steam-boat,’ the poems, and – were completely absorbed in your verses! We were absolutely absorbed by your photographs! We had a hard time deciding whom you resemble more, your mom, or your dad, i.e. Maiak[ovskii] or Khlebn[ikov]. And finally we determined that in these

on his teachers. Here is Brik's letter of September 24, 1942:

<...> You are not Khlebnikov, you are not Maiakovskii. You are Glazkov, and this is certain. Aseev is a poet, but a lesser one than Khlebnikov. The very talented Kirsanov is a lesser poet than Maiakovskii. But you are neither lesser nor better. You are – Glazkov. You know the way to Poetsville.¹²⁹

<...> Kolcn'ka, you have an absolute sense of art (if I may put it this way). This is your nature. Maiakovskii was the same way. Just to understand – is not enough. Kirsanov understands, in fact he understands very well. Aseev – understands quite badly, but he has more of that “sense” than Kirsanov <...>

Interestingly, Lili Brik did not compare Glazkov to his peers Kul'chitskii and Slutskii, with whom she also remained on close terms and whose development she followed with a deep sympathy.¹³⁰ She compares Glazkov to his mentors, established poets, and – not in favor of the latter. As her letter unequivocally suggests, Lili Brik considered Aseev and Kirsanov to be mere imitators of Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii, while she saw Glazkov as their true heir. Although he continued to employ inexact rhymes, paronomasia, neologisms, and inversion, Glazkov had by this time created a new lyrical voice that was quite different from those of his primary masters. It was whimsically ironic in a way which marked a sharp departure from Maiakovskii's sarcasm, Khlebnikov's naiveté, and Kruchenykh's smirking cynicism. Already noticeable in the best of his earlier poems, Glazkov's special brand of irony (which would be aptly defined as “buffoonery”¹³¹) became more distinct and consistent in the works he wrote during the evacuation, such as “Stepan Kumyrskii,” “Mirovaia dur',” and many short poems. Here is one of them, written in 1943:

Мир нормальный, нормированный,
По порядкам нумерованный,
Совершает в ногу шествие, –
Я ж стою за сумашествие.¹³²

photographs you look amazingly like Maiakovskii (though it remains unknown – mom or dad, because it is not known who of them is mom and who is dad!)”

¹²⁹ Poetsville (Poetograd) was Glazkov's coinage for an imaginary city, where avant-garde poetry reigned. In the 1940s Glazkov even produced a map of Poetograd, where one could find, for example, Pasternak street, Maiakovskii lighthouse, Kamenskii airport, Khlebnikov boulevard, and, on the other hand, Lebedev-Kumach blind alley (reproduced in *Samye moi stikhi*, 21).

¹³⁰ See letters of Lili Brik to N. Glazkov in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 195-196.

¹³¹ See Evgenii Evtushenko, “Skomorokh i bogatyr' ” in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 405.

¹³² *Izbrannoe*, 462.

(World of normality, of standards
Numbered in order,
Is marching in step,
But I stand for madness.)

Glazkov's characteristic buffoonery was also apparent in his penchant for donning different masks, such as the mask of a "holy fool," who "innocently" talked politically dangerous "nonsense," or the mask of a "literary bohemian" which he would adopt after his return to Moscow at the end of 1943. Such extravagant behavior, both in literature and in life, was a direct challenge to the Soviet authorities, who demanded that writers present "positive heroes" who were ideologically and morally "impeccable." Certainly, Glazkov's poetic persona could never be mistaken for the ideal Soviet man:

С чудным именем Глазкова
Я родился в пьянваре.
Нету месяца такого
Ни в каком календаре.¹³³

(Bearing the lovely name of Glazkov
I was born in Drunkuary.
This month does not exist
In any calendar.)

Constant love affairs, casual sexual encounters, and wild parties with fellow poets became Glazkov's favorite themes, elaborated upon in numerous poems. The theme of alcohol and its revitalizing power assumed a special importance:

Выпить бы не мешало
Думают люди Земшара.¹³⁴

(It would not be a bad thing to have a drink –
Thus inhabitants of the Earth think.)

Or:

Стоит мороз сорокоградусный –
Он тянется к сорокоградусной.
Сняет день весенний, радостный –
Он тянется к сорокоградусной.¹³⁵

¹³³ *Samye moi stikhi*, 26.

¹³⁴ Archive of N.N. Glazkov. Here Glazkov uses Khlebnikov's most famous neologism "Zemshar," made out of two words, *Zemnoi shar* (Globe).

¹³⁵ Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

(When the frost reaches forty degrees –
He reaches for vodka.
When a joyful spring day comes –
He reaches for vodka.)

Or:

Он помнит чудное мгновенье
Не пьянства, а опохмеленья.
Лишь потому что очень часто
Не помнит он мгновенья пьянства.¹³⁶

(He recalls a wondrous moment
Not of drinking, but of taking a drink “the morning after.”
Only because very often
He can’t recall the moment of drinking.)

Ironically, all of these subjects would have been met with incomprehension not only from the Soviet authorities, but from Glazkov’s chief influences, the Futurists, as well. The theme of drinking was absolutely alien to the latter group, who disapprovingly labeled it decadent in their discussions of Imaginist poetry, especially the poetry of Sergei Esenin.¹³⁷ Unlike Esenin’s verses, however, Glazkov’s vivid depictions of his drunken adventures, and even his numerous declarations of his passion for vodka, were not intended to be read as personal confessions. The poet distorted and exaggerated facts in a comical fashion, as a means of simultaneously coping with and resisting a hostile environment. Glazkov clarifies this matter in the following poem:

Пьяному быть хорошо:
Пьяный безумьем умен,
Пьяный не ищет дорог,
Сами ведут его ноги.¹³⁸

(It is great to be drunk:
A drunkard is insanely wise,
A drunkard is not looking which way to go,
His feet lead him in the right direction.)

In Glazkov’s poetry to be “drunk” means to put oneself beyond fear and to reach

¹³⁶ *Izbrannoe*, 515.

¹³⁷ See Kruchenykh’s works on Esenin, such as *Drama Esenina* (1925), *Gibel’ Esenina* (1926), *Esenin i Moskva kabatskaia* (1926), and several others written and published in 1926.

¹³⁸ Archive of N.N.Glazkov.

joy and personal freedom, hardly attainable in a sober condition.¹³⁹ This perception of alcohol's extraordinary role in Soviet citizens' everyday life closely resembles Bakhtin's famous notion of "carnival" as a shield against the reigning status quo, because it allows "temporal liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order."¹⁴⁰ In particular, it explains Glazkov's choice of the most appropriate position for making value judgments or generalizations – underneath the restaurant table, where drunkards find themselves at the end of the day. In "Stikhi, napisannye pod stolom" (1945), the poet states:

Ощуцаю мир во всем величии,
Обобщаю даже пустяки,
Как поэты полон безразличия
Ко всему тому, что не стихи.

Лез всю жизнь в богатыри, да в гении,
Для веселия планета пусть стара.
Я без бочки Диогена диогеннее
И увидел мир из-под стола.

.....
Я на все взираю из-под столика.
Век двадцатый – век необычайный.
Чем столетье лучше для историка,
Тем для современника печальней.¹⁴¹

(I perceive the world in all its majesty,
Generalizing even trifles,
And, like other poets, remain indifferent
To everything but verses.

Throughout my life I strived to be a hero and a genius,
Never mind that our planet is too old for joy.
Without Diogenes' tub I am even more Diogenes-like,
And look at the world from underneath a [restaurant] table.

.....

¹³⁹ All this makes Glazkov a direct predecessor of the prose writer Venedikt Erofeev (1938-1990), whose most famous work *Moskva-Petushki* (1969) bears many striking similarities – in both themes and treatment – with Glazkov's poems of that period.

¹⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i Renessansa*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965, 13. I was not able to determine whether the young Glazkov was familiar with this work, which was published more than twenty-five years after it had been written, but we can not rule out such a possibility. In 1940, Bakhtin came to Moscow (where he would spend the war years) to submit his dissertation on Rabelais, and his ideas could have reached Glazkov through Lili Brik and her circle.

¹⁴¹ *Samye moi stikhi*, 54.

I watch the world from underneath a restaurant table.
 The twentieth century is an amazing century.
 The better an age is for a historian,
 The sadder it is for a contemporary.)

And indeed, Glazkov's position "underneath a restaurant table" proved to be quite effective. It gave the poet a perspective that allowed him to come up with the aphorism, «Чем столетье лучше для историка, тем для современника печальней» which instantly became extremely popular among Glazkov's acquaintances and even beyond this circle. Needless to say, this aphorism would sound ambiguous from any official standpoint,¹⁴² but not only did it ingeniously define Glazkov's own "place and time," but strikes us today as a universal formula.

It was Glazkov's stance of comedic political subversion that led Evgenii Evtushenko to describe him as "a buffoon and a hero all at once."¹⁴³ Glazkov's "heroism," however, was most obvious in the dangerous games he played with the official language, a characteristic that can already be observed in his early works, but which was brought to the fore in the poems he created around the mid-1940s. In one of these pieces, the poet plays with the word "передовая" (editorial), which in the Soviet newspapers was reserved exclusively for the most important ideological issues:

Жили-были в номерах,
 Говорили о мирах,
 Из уст в уста передавая,
 Что говорит передовая.¹⁴⁴

(Once upon a time [we] lived in hotel rooms,
 Talked about other worlds,
 Spreading by word of mouth
 What the editorials say.)

The problems of "other worlds" had nothing to do with the content of a regular "peredovaia," so it should have been immediately clear to every reader (or listener) of the

¹⁴² See Genrikh Saggir's recollections about the Soviet authorities' reaction to this poem: "Some time ago, in one of the Soviet newspapers, most likely in *Pravda*, was published a satirical article about the underground writers, and as an example of their ultimate moral decay, the author provided Glazkov's stunning stanza: 'I watch the world from underneath a restaurant table etc.'" (In *Samizdat veka*, 372).

¹⁴³ "Skomorokh i bogatyr'," 408.

¹⁴⁴ Archive of N.N.Glazkov.

poem that Glazkov was ridiculing the major tool of official brainwashing.

Another important part of the Soviet propaganda system, the political mass-meeting (митинг), which was customarily used for “enthusiastic” approval of the Party’s “wise decisions,” was also mocked by Glazkov. The personage in the following poem indulges in heavy drinking during one such meeting, but the poet seems only to sympathize with this outrageous behavior:

Очень пьяный Митенька
Возвращался с митинга.
Но скажите, разве зло
В том, что Митю развезло.¹⁴⁵

(A very drunk Miten’ka
Was coming home from a mass-meeting.
But let me ask you, is it so evil
That Mitia got sloshed?)

In another poem, Glazkov even targets the sacred Soviet emblem of «серп и молот» (hammer and sickle):

Луна была как серп и молот
На звездном знамени небес.
И освещала темный город.
И был поэт не очень трезв.¹⁴⁶

(The moon was like hammer and sickle
On the starry banner of the sky.
And it lit the dark town.
And the poet was not quite sober.)

As the last line suggests, it is the poet’s state of inebriation that causes him to see these patriotic images in the sky. The drunken vision of the ordinary moon in the shape of “hammer and sickle” is not merely awkward, but unquestionably ambiguous, especially against the backdrop of the Futurist tradition of comparing this celestial body (dutifully glorified by previous generations of poets) to the most unattractive and even disgusting objects.¹⁴⁷

It is with an especial ardor, however, that Glazkov plays with words like «гений»,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

¹⁴⁷ See Nikolai Khardzhiev and Boris Trenin, *Poeticheskaia kul'tura Maiakovskogo*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970, 65.

«великий», and «основоположник», which had been “sacrosanct” since the beginning of the 1930’s.¹⁴⁸ Although this lexicon was used exclusively in discourse about communist leaders or a few selected authors, Glazkov repeatedly applies these ideologemes to himself:

Я гений и знаток,
Но действую не так.¹⁴⁹

(I am a genius and an expert,
But act wrong.)

Or:

Я общепризнанный непризнанный гений,
Легендарный Глазков...¹⁵⁰

(I am a widely recognized unrecognized genius,
Legendary Glazkov...)

Or:

Да здравствует небывализм,
И я как основоположник!¹⁵¹

(Long live nebyvalism
And me as the founder!)

The most daring example of this kind provides the title of Glazkov’s narrative poem “Po glazkovskim mestam” (1946), which mocks the generic titles of Soviet hagiographic works about national classics, such as “Po pushkinskim mestam,” and the like.¹⁵² The content of these works, which always depicted the writers’ geographical, familial, and social connections, is also travestied by Glazkov, who instead proudly presents himself and his circle of eccentric pals.

In accordance with the usual format of pamphlets, Glazkov begins his poem with the place where he grew up – the ancient Moscow street of Arbat:

Арбат горбат. Еще не скоро,
Припоминая нашу старь,

¹⁴⁸ See Nikolai Aseev’s “Antigenial’naia poema” (1930), where he expresses his concerns about this tendency.

¹⁴⁹ *Samye moi stikhi*, 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵¹ Archive of N. N. Glazkov.

¹⁵² Fragments of the poem were published under the title “Rasputitsa” in *Avtoportret*, 163-168.

Проспектом назовут Глазкова,
 Быть может, эту магистраль.

.....
 Был дом Глазкова трехэтажный,
 Недолговечный для веков,
 Какой был дом, совсем неважно,
 А важно, что там жил Глазков.¹⁵³

(Arbat is humpback. It will take a while
 Before it will be renamed
 Glazkov Prospect
 In memory of our past.

.....
 Glazkov's house was a three-story building
 Not intended to last for centuries.
 It is unimportant what kind of house it was,
 But it is important that Glazkov used to live there.)

After this introduction, Glazkov leisurely proceeds to other Moscow “places of interest,” which turn out to be almost entirely the home addresses of his close buddies, all of whom resided in downtown Moscow at the time. During this lengthy tour Glazkov completely ignores the capital’s historical and official sights, and this was undoubtedly intentional negligence. When Glazkov must finally mention the most famous of these places (one of his friends happened to live near the Kremlin), the poet does not refer to it by the name that has become symbolic of Soviet statehood. He chooses instead the most neutral euphemism:

А возле стен и возле башен,
 Возле Каменного моста,
 В переулке во Лебяжьем
 Жил Саша Межиров, мастак.¹⁵⁴

(Meanwhile, by the walls and towers [of Kremlin],
 Near the Kamennyi bridge,
 In the Lebiazhii alley,
 Once lived Sasha Mezhirov, master of all trades.)

The same inclination to turn the official canon inside out can be seen in the way Glazkov introduces his buddies to the reader. Although all of them are presented in the poem under their real names, the reader learns little or nothing factual about their lives.

¹⁵³ *Avtoportret*, 163.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

They had just returned from World War II, abundantly decorated, but this fact is not even mentioned in the poem. Instead, Glazkov focuses on details, which look either insignificant or enigmatic, or both. Here are the passages devoted to Sergei Narovchatov and David Kaufman:

И Кауфман, веселый малый,
И не кричащий «караул!»
Со своей женою Лялей
Живет Мархлевского на ул.

Прохожие там очень редки,
Стоят дома зубчатые,
Еще квартира там и предки
Сережи Наровчатова.

Глазков беседовал с Сережей
Как с собутыльником стиха,
Сережа был такой хороший
И говорил: ха-ха.

И Кауфман по убеждению
Примерно был такой как мы.
Но он с Глазковым расхожденье
Имел по поводу зимы.

Зима – паршивейший сезон,
И если говорить серьезно,
Хоть и вдыхаю я озон,
Но не переставая мерзну...¹⁵⁵

(And Kaufman, a jolly fellow,
Who does not shout for help.
Lives with his wife Lialia
On Markhlevskii Street.

Pedestrians are very rare there,
The buildings are crenellated.
In one of them is also an apartment and the old folks of
Serezha Narovchatov.

Glazkov conversed with Serezha,
As a poetic drinking companion,
Serezha was so sweet
And kept saying “Ha-ha.”

And Kaufman with his convictions
Was about the same as us,

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

But he had a disagreement with Glazkov
As far as winter was concerned.

Winter is a despicable season,
And speaking seriously,
Though I inhale ozone,
I am freezing all the time...)

In the same fashion the poet depicts his other pals: the “Nebyvalist” Iulian Dolgin, one Ikonin, an author, and finally Shura Kuzin, a pilot, who stands out of the rest of them for the following reason:

...первый был несумасшедший
Какого в жизни я встречал.¹⁵⁶

(...he was the first sane person
I've met in my life.)

Glazkov also pays homage to his alma mater, the Literary Institute, and to its most memorable inhabitants, finishing his narration on a pseudo-solemn note:

А я в году 46-м
Отметил не одну обитель,
Слагая о себе самом
Справочник-путеводитель.¹⁵⁷

(In the year 1946
I mentioned more than one dwelling-place,
Composing a guidebook
About myself.)

In this “guidebook” Glazkov consistently employs inexact and compound rhymes, irregular metrical patterns, as well as a special kind of inversion (e.g. «Живет Мархлевского на ул.»), which had been very typical of Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii.¹⁵⁸ Glazkov’s ingenious use of these Futurist devices is a powerful contribution to the burlesque effect of the poem.

“Po glazkovskim mestam” seems strikingly jolly, although Glazkov’s personal situation was far from being an easy one at that time. Unlike his fellow-poets, many of whom were mentioned in the poem, Glazkov had not been able to publish and there was

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁵⁸ See on this matter Khardzhiev, “Maiakovskii i Khlebnikov,” 82-83.

little hope that the situation would ever improve. The poem dedicated to the monument of the first Russian printer Ivan Fiodorov, located in downtown Moscow, addresses this issue with characteristic Glazkovian irony:

В моей башке какой-то рой вопросовый,
 Должно быть, надоевший мне и вам.
 А где-то там чугунный или бронзовый
 Первопечатник Федоров Иван.

Там люди бегают, подошвами стучат они,
 Так ибо у людей заведено,
 И веруют они в книгопечатание,
 Которое не изобретено!¹⁵⁹

(In my noddle there is a swarm of questions
 That you and I are probably bored with.
 And somewhere over there, made of cast iron or bronze,
 The pioneering printer Fiodorov Ivan is standing.

People over there fuss around, stamping their feet,
 Because this is the way they live,
 And they believe in book printing,
 That has not been invented yet.)

Deprived of any legal readership, Glazkov began to distribute his poems in the form of handmade books, many of which have survived to this day in the poet's personal archive, kept by his son, N.N. Glazkov, as well as in other private archives.¹⁶⁰ Although the majority of these books have brightly covered covers and, sometimes, illustrations, they look rather conventional in comparison with the Futurists' handwritten editions. Still, many of Glazkov's handmade books have their own very distinctive feature – the word “Samsebiaizdat” (Selfpublishing) on their covers. This was a word of the poet's own coinage, which he eventually contracted to “Samizdat.” Although Glazkov did this much later in his career, an adjective derived from that same noun can already be found in one of his poems written before the mid-1940s: «Утверждаю одно и то же я. / самиздатным стихом не стихая...» (I declare the same thing all the time, / nonstop with

¹⁵⁹ *Izbrannoe*, 173.

¹⁶⁰ Recently, N.N. Glazkov donated part of his archive to Bremen University (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 134).

my samizdat verses...)¹⁶¹ This poem, which I found in the poet's archive, convincingly confirms Glazkov's later assertion: «Самиздат... Придумал это слово я еще в сороковом году...» ("Samizdat..." I invented this word as early as in 1940...¹⁶²)

Not surprisingly, this samizdat production did not earn its author even a single penny, and Glazkov supported himself by doing odd jobs, such as sawing firewood and the like.¹⁶³ The poet had had very little means of subsistence, but still felt upbeat, as one of his poems justifies:

За неведомым бредущие,
Как поэты, сумасшедшие,
Мы готовы предыдущее
Променять на непришедшее.

Не тужи о нас. Нам весело
И в подвале нищеты;
Неожиданность инверсии
Мы подняли на щиты.¹⁶⁴

(Traipsing after the unknown,
Mad like poets,
We are ready to exchange the past
For something that never happened.

Do not feel sorry for us. We are enjoying ourselves
Even in the cellar of hardship;
We are making much
Of the unexpectedness of inversion.)

At some point, however, Glazkov evinced signs of losing his ability to enjoy himself "in the cellar of hardship." In a poem written in 1944 he expressed – for the first time in all these years – serious doubts about his poetic strategy:

Без стихов моя жизнь петля,
Только надо с ума сойти,
Чтоб, как прежде, писать стихи для,
Очень умных, но десяти.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Archive of N.N. Glazkov.

¹⁶² *Izbrannoe*, 198.

¹⁶³ See Glazkov's poem "Svoikh stikhov ne izdavaia..." (1944), *Izbrannoe*, 99. On his return to Moscow in 1943, Glazkov survived only with the financial help of a childhood friend and Lili Brik. She even gave Glazkov shelter in her apartment and all but saved him from death by starvation (See Dolgin, 100).

¹⁶⁴ *Izbrannoe*, 68.

(Without poetry my life is a noose,
But it would be insane
To write, as I used to,
For only ten [readers], even if they are very smart.)

Similar concerns were repeated in Glazkov's poignant poetic conversations with Osip and Lili Brik, also recorded in 1944.¹⁶⁶ Both of them worked hard to persuade the young poet not to give up, and Glazkov promptly overcame his attack of despair.¹⁶⁷ He continued to proclaim unconditional loyalty to his chosen path, despite all of its bumps and hurdles. He expressed his commitment in the strongest terms in the poem "Boiarynia Morozova" (1945), which was undoubtedly dedicated to Lili Brik, his most steadfast supporter in his efforts to keep the avant-garde tradition alive.

In "Boiarynia Morozova" the poet refers to Surikov's famous painting, which depicts one of the bloodiest pages in Russian history – the persecution of Old Believers in the seventeenth century. The painting portrays one of the most devout and influential Old Believers, the boiarynia Morozova, on her way to exile. Although a huge crowd gathers around the rebellious boiarynia, only the holy fool, who is sitting half-naked on the snow, dares to express his loyalty to the persecuted faith:

...Нищий там, и у него вериги,
Он старообрядец и юродивый.

У него горит святая вера,
На костре святой той веры греется,
И с остервененьем изувера
Лучше всех двумя перстами крестится.¹⁶⁸

(...A pauper is over there, and he wears fetters,
He is an Old Believer and a holy fool.
His sacred faith is burning,

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁶⁶ Here are the lines from the poem addressed to Osip Brik (1944): «Поэтоград – программа максимум ведь, / А много денег – программа минимум...» (Poetsville is, after all, the most I am shooting for, / While the least is a lot of money...) On the same note Glazkov wrote to Lili Brik in 1944: «Мне, так сказать, приходится охотиться / За каждую засушную монетою. / А ежели у нас пути расходятся, / То и не то бывает в жизни этой». (I am, so to speak, have to hunt / For every penny for survival. / So, if our ways part / There are even worse things that happen in life; archive of N.N.Glazkov).

¹⁶⁷ With Lili Brik's assistance, Glazkov managed around this time to get a job as secretary to the prominent Soviet actor Vladimir Iakhontov, who, however, shortly afterward committed suicide. See Glazkov's poem "Na smert' Vladimira Nikolaevicha Iakhontova" (1945), *Izbrannoe*, 111-112.

¹⁶⁸ *Samye moi stikhi*, 59.

He warms himself on the bonfire of that faith,
 And with the madness of a zealot
 He crosses himself with two fingers better than anyone else.)

The holy fool's selfless fanaticism reminds Glazkov of his own devotion to his poetic beliefs:¹⁶⁹

...Я юродивый Поэтограда,
 Я заплачу для оригинальности...
 У меня костер нетленной веры,
 И на нем сгорают все грехи.
 Я поэт ненаступившей эры,
 Лучше всех пишу свои стихи.¹⁷⁰

(I am a holy fool of Poetsville,
 I will cry just to be original.
 I've got a bonfire of imperishable faith,
 And all sins burn down in its flames.
 I am a poet of the era yet to come,
 I write my verse better than anyone else.)

As so often in the past, Glazkov found his chief inspiration in his teacher Khlebnikov, who had also lived in total destitution. Khlebnikov's exemplary faithfulness to his poetic destiny set a standard which Glazkov struggled to live up to, even though he was not quite convinced of the positive results of his own enterprise. In a poem, written in 1945, he presents the problem with his own distinctive mixture of pathos and humor:

Куда спешим? Чего мы ищем,
 Какого мы хотим пожара?
 Был Хлебников. Он умер нищим,
 Но председателем Земшара.
 Стал я. На Хлебникова очень,
 Как говорили мне, похожий;
 В делах бессмыслен, в мыслях точен,
 Однако не такой хороший.
 Пусть я ленивый, неупрямый,
 Но все равно согласен с Марксом:

¹⁶⁹ This comparison was especially apt, because at the end of the seventeenth century holy fools were about to lose their traditional privilege of legal inviolability (see "Smekh kak zrelishche," in D.S. Likhachev and A.M. Panchenko, *Smekhovoi mir drevnei Rusi*, Leningrad: Nauka, 1976, 180-183.)

¹⁷⁰ *Samye moi stikhi*, 58-59.

В истории что было драмой,
То может повториться фарсом.¹⁷¹

(Where do we hurry? What are we looking for?
What kind of fire we want?
There was Khlebnikov. He died dirt poor,
But he was the President of the Universe.
Now here I am. I look very much like Khlebnikov,
As people told me;
I am aimless in practical matters, sharp in thoughts,
But not as good as he was.
All right, I am lazy, I am not persistent,
But I agree with Marx anyway:
What happened in history once as a drama,
Can repeat itself as a farce.)

In his desperate struggle to stay on track, Glazkov chose as a motto Khlebnikov's line "О, засмейтесь смехачи!"¹⁷² (O, laugh it out, you laughsters!), which he inserted as a direct quote in his other piece, also dedicated to his teacher:

Мне нехватает на харчи,
Но чтоб в глупца не превратиться,
Скажу: «Засмейтесь, смехачи!»
Как «Все-таки она вертится!»¹⁷³
(I don't have enough for grub,
But in order not to become a fool,
I will say "Laugh it out, you laughsters!"
As "But it does move.")

In this poem Glazkov compares his Khlebnikovian motto to Galileo's legendary phrase "Eppur si muove" (it does move), which the famous scientist uttered after his forced recantation. Such a comparison does not seem superficial. For many years Glazkov displayed a similarly stubborn adherence to his poetic principles, while enduring the constant threat of persecution by his own, Soviet, inquisition.

This risk only grew worse in 1946, when ideological controls, slightly loosened during wartime, became tighter than ever. A whole cascade of official campaigns broke out: the notorious resolution, "O zhurnalakh Zvezda i Leningrad" (1946), which attacked

¹⁷¹ *Izbrannoe*, 123.

¹⁷² "Zakliatie smekhom" (1909).

¹⁷³ "V. Khlebnikovu" (1944), *Izbrannoe*, 98.

Akhmatova and Zoshchenko,¹⁷⁴ was followed by the campaign against “rootless cosmopolitans,” in the course of which many prominent literary figures were condemned.¹⁷⁵ Simultaneously, a new wave of the “anti-formalism” campaign began. It was launched by the Central Committee decree, “Ob opere Vano Muradeli ‘Velikaia družba’” (10 February 1948), which accused Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitrii Shostakovich of distorting the language of the musical classics. At the next Central Committee conference with Soviet composers and musicians Andrei Zhdanov urged the denunciation of “esthetes and formalists,”¹⁷⁶ and this appeal was immediately put into effect. The campaign affected not only composers and musicians but artists and writers as well. Among the latter, one could find the majority of Glazkov’s mentors from the Literary Institute – Aseev, Kirsanov, and Sel’vinskii, who were accused of “formalistic stunts” such as the usage of neologisms, puns, alliterations, inexact rhymes, and non-conventional rhythmic patterns.¹⁷⁷ All of them were named as the direct followers of Khlebnikov, whose legacy was labeled as “one of the main sources of formalism in poetry.”¹⁷⁸ Aseev was also sharply criticized for his narrative poem “Maiakovskii nachinaetsia,” in which he attributed to Khlebnikov the role of Maiakovskii’s primary teacher.¹⁷⁹

Quite understandably, during this new onslaught of official persecutions, when most of his supporters fell into disfavor, Glazkov lost the fearlessness of his youth. Physically and mentally exhausted, he became disillusioned with the lonely struggle,

¹⁷⁴ This resolution was retracted as erroneous only on October 20, 1988, by a special decision of the Central Committee. This act, as it was believed, “affirmed the decisive turn of the Party’s approach to art and literature” (Viacheslav Vozdvizhenskii. “Put’ v kazarmu,” in *Izbavlenie ot mirazhei. Sotsrealizm segodnia*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1990, 124).

¹⁷⁵ For more details on the campaign against cosmopolitanism see Evgenii Dobrenko, *Metafora vlasti. Literatura stalinskoi epokhi v istoricheskom osveshchenii*, München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1993, 321-364.

¹⁷⁶ Sbornik materialov, “Soveshchanie deiatelei sovetskoi muzyki v TsK VKP(b),” Moscow, 1948, 143.

¹⁷⁷ See Boris Iakovlev, “Poet dlia estetov,” *Novyi mir*, no. 5 (1948): 216-217, 220-226.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 207-209.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 214. The whole chapter of “Maiakovskii nachinaetsia” dedicated to Khlebnikov, as well as all of the fragments of the text dedicated to Khlebnikov or Kruchenykh, were excluded from the editions that appeared in 1951 and 1953.

which he had carried out all these years.¹⁸⁰ It had begun to seem pointless as well as dangerous. The poet abruptly decided to “recant,”¹⁸¹ announcing his decision in the poem “Ob’iasnitel’naia zapiska”:

Я достаточно сделал для после,
Для потом, для веков, славы для;
И хочу ощутительной пользы
От меня не признавшего дня.

И считаю, что лучше гораздо,
Принимая сует суету,
Под диктовку писать государства,
Чем, как я, диктовать в пустоту.

Мне писать надоело в ящик
И твердить, что я гений и скиф,
Для читателей настоящих,
Для редакторов никаких.¹⁸²

(I did enough for afterwards,
For tomorrow, for the future, for fame;
But I want to derive palpable benefit
From the current day, which has not recognized me.

And I believe that it is much better,
Accepting the vanity of vanities,
To write under orders from the state
Than to dictate into void as I used to.

I’m fed up with writing for the drawer,
With repeating that I’m a genius and Scythian
To real readers,
To non-existent editors.)

This “explanatory note” was written in great seriousness, without even a hint of

¹⁸⁰ Here is a characteristic recollection by Sergei Shtein, Glazkov’s friend and neighbor: “Ilia Sel’vinskii, whose seminars at the Literary Institute were attended by Nikolai Glazkov, once told him: ‘How happy you are, Kolia!’ Glazkov expressed his sincere astonishment that a poet who earned his living by sawing firewood could be considered happy. Ilia L’vovich replied: ‘You can write anything you want.’ ” (“Vospominaniia soseda” in *Vospominaniia o Nikolae Glazkove*, 37).

¹⁸¹ Glazkov’s son, N.N. Glazkov gave three reasons for the poet’s decision to recant: he realized that there was absolutely no way to publish; he wanted to fit into society; he had lost the moral support from Lili Brik and Vasilii Katanian (Personal interview, July 22, 1996). Regarding the last consideration, Dolgin recalled that Brik and Katanian changed their attitude towards Glazkov because of his supposedly inappropriate reaction to the campaign against “cosmopolitans” (Personal interview, July 26, 1996).

¹⁸² *Samye moi stikhi*, 62.

Glazkov's customary irony.¹⁸³ Indeed, the poet was very serious about his decision to submit to the government's demands, and after his recantation he produced only a few pieces in his previous, truly "Glazkovian," style. One of them is his narrative poem "Epopeia" (1948), in which he depicts his drunken adventures with a girl named Lena:

И я удаляюсь с нею,
Целуя ее много раз,
Заканчивая объясненья,
Тогда она мне отдалась

На лестнице деревянной,
Поломанной по краям.
Я был изумительно пьяный
Как и Омар Хайям.¹⁸⁴

(And I am moving away with her,
Kissing her many times,
Finishing our conversation,
And then she gave herself to me

On wooden stairs
Broken on the sides.
I was marvelously drunk,
Like Omar Khayyam.)

To the same category belongs the piece "Mrachnye trusheby" about a girl named Svetlana (1950), and the semi-fantastic narrative poem "Odinochestvo" (1950), which contained many felicitous lines, such as these:

Над Москвою небо сине-сине,
Час такой – не поздно и не рано;
И не купишь водки в магазине,
И уже закрыты рестораны.

¹⁸³ Compare it with a poem Glazkov wrote in 1944, in which he briefly considered the possibility of such radical changes: "... А стихи свои я писал и читал, / Ибо есть дарованье от Бога; / Но за всю мою жизнь почти что ни черта / Не дала мне сия работа. // Я работу эту очень люблю: / Больше, чем самого себя; / Но меня почему-то тянет к рублю, / Если мне не хватает рубля. // Быть полезным стране я себя приучу, / Но не стану хуже я сам, / И когда тысяч сто, наконец, получу, / Пятьдесят раздарю друзьям" (...And I wrote and read my poetry in public / Because I had a gift from God; / However for all my life not a damn thing / Was I able to earn by this work. // I love this work dearly, / More than I love myself; / But for some reasons I feel attraction to money / When I don't have enough of it. // I will teach myself how to be useful for that country, / But as a person I will not change to worse, / And if I eventually get hundred thousand [rubles], / I will give away fifty [thousand] to my friends; archive of N.N. Glazkov).

¹⁸⁴ *Samye moi stikhi*, 67.

...В час четвертый ни утра ни ночи
 Видишь мир особыми глазами...
 Ну, а если выпить хочешь очень –
 Водка есть на Киевском вокзале...¹⁸⁵

(The sky above Moscow is bright blue,
 The time is neither late, nor early:
 One cannot buy vodka in a liquor store yet,
 And the restaurants are already closed.

...After 3 AM, when it is neither night, nor morning,
 One sees the world in a special way...
 And if you are must to get a drink –
 There is vodka at Kievskii railroad station...)

After 1950, however, Glazkov composed only one poem that could measure up to his earlier achievements. But this “miniature” immediately became part of Soviet popular culture:

И неприятности любви
 В лесу забавны и милы:
 Ее кусали муравьи,
 Меня кусали комары.¹⁸⁶

(Even the mishaps of love
 Are funny and pleasant in the woods:
 She was bitten by ants,
 I was bitten by mosquitoes.)

Besides a handful of exceptions, most of which we have enumerated above, Glazkov’s new poems bore little resemblance to his earlier verses: innovation of form was replaced by entirely conventional aesthetics, moralizing was substituted for irony, ideological rebellion gave way to claims of loyalty to the regime. These poems were unquestionably “publishable” and enabled Glazkov to launch an official career.

His first poetic collection, *Moia estrada*, appeared in 1957, and it was a huge disappointment to the admirers of Glazkov’s samizdat verses, since the book included

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 74. These lines were cited by Vsevolod Nekrasov in his “Predystoriia” (*Russkii zhurnal*, 22.09.1997. http://www.russ.ru/journal/ist_sovr/97-09-22/nekra.htm 17. 03.2001) with the characteristic remark that “they stuck in the memory no less vividly than Imaginism.”

¹⁸⁶ *Samye moi stikhi*, 68.

only a few of them, in censored form.¹⁸⁷ One of these poems, “Voron” (1938), which playfully imitated famous Poe’s poem, was published with major editorial changes to the fourth stanza. The original stanza had read:

Я сказал: – Пусть в личной жизни
 Неудачник я всегда.
 Но народы в коммунизме
 Сыщут счастье? – Никогда!¹⁸⁸

(I said: – Let me be unlucky
 In my personal life.
 But can people
 Find happiness in Communism? – Nevermore!)

Now it was replaced with something very trivial:

Я сказал: – Невзгоды часты,
 Неудачник я всегда.
 Но друзья добьются счастья?
 Он ответил: – Никогда!¹⁸⁹

(I said: – Mishaps are frequent,
 I am always a loser.
 But will my friends find happiness?
 He answered: – Nevermore!)

The original text of “Voron” appeared in print only in 1989, in Glazkov’s *Izbrannoe*, along with his other early poems, most of which came to readers for the first time.

During his lifetime, Glazkov managed to publish more than a dozen collections of verses, all of which were at best mediocre, exemplifying an awkward compromise with the aesthetics of Socialist Realism. Simultaneously, the poet continued to produce some work in samizdat, but it, also, was rarely impressive. It resembled, as Evgenii Evtushenko put it, a “hasty skit,”¹⁹⁰ consisting for the most part of epigrams and occasional poems, such as verse written in honor of his friends’ birthdays. The majority of these poems were

¹⁸⁷ See, for example, the letter of the young underground poet Leonid Chertkov to his fellow-poet Valentin Khromov written on July 13, 1958: “I have already seen Glazkov’s collection – it contains only ‘Voron,’ ‘Biurokraty kamennogo veka,’ and a stanza «Официантки как трамваи – когда их ждешь, то не идут...» (Waitresses are like street-carts – when you are waiting for them, they do not come...) The rest is – trash.” (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen. Historisches Archiv, F. 92).

¹⁸⁸ *Izbrannoe*, 19.

¹⁸⁹ *Moia estrada*, [Kalinin]: Kalininskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1957, 89.

¹⁹⁰ *Izbrannoe*, 8.

acrostics, a last tribute to Glazkov's former fascination with experimental poetry.¹⁹¹

Sometimes, however, his acrostics were little more than an innocuous game, as Sergei Biriukov, the avant-garde poet and theoretician, would later recollect:

...From time to time, Glazkov sent his poems to a youth newspaper where I was working in the 1970s... Once I received a new set of poems and turned it in for type-setting. A little later, the executive editor entered my room, threw a printout on my desk and said: "Read from the top down." I read: "TO DEAR LEONID IL'ICH." There was no need to explain who Leonid Il'ich was. Brezhnev, of course... It was a criminal case! These days, one would say: sots-art, conceptualism, but then it was just a mockery.¹⁹²

As can be seen, Glazkov retained his predilection for shocking escapades, "happenings" of a sort. One such escapade is described in the memoirs of Konstantin Vanshenkin:

At the same time, Kolia's tricks were not just extravagant. At the very beginning of the 1960s, during Khrushchev's rule, I presided at a big poetry reading in the conference hall of the "Caliber" factory. Not only were all the seats occupied, even the stage was crowded... And here is Glazkov on the stage, reading in a monotonous, feeble voice a poem that describes how bad it was during Stalin's times. And suddenly:

Now all this is forgotten,
Our people are moving in another direction.
What I do like about Nikita,
Is that he does not beat the flies with his nostril.¹⁹³

I looked at the audience. Everybody leaned back, all at once, pressing their necks against the chairs, like men in a barber's shop. The shock was so profound that nobody laughed. There was complete silence... Meanwhile Kolia took advantage of the stunning effect he had produced and kept reading in the same monotonous voice... Interestingly, the episode did not entail any consequences.¹⁹⁴

Not surprisingly, Glazkov remained a local legend almost to the end of his life. The main reason for this status, however, was not his "extravagant tricks," but his early

¹⁹¹ Another trace of the Futurist influence that can be found in Glazkov's "official" poetry was his attraction to oddly sounding words, such as Yakut in a Russian transcription. For example, one of the poems from his book *Dorogi i zvezdy* (1966) is entitled «Ытык кырдыгарас». Glazkov also retained an acute interest in the prominent figures of the Futurist movement. When David Burliuk visited Moscow in 1956, Glazkov came to the Maiakovskii Museum to meet him. Glazkov remained close to Kruchenykh to the end of his life and was among the few people who attended Kruchenykh's funeral in 1968 (Libedinskaia, "I ego zachisliat v knigu..." 220.)

¹⁹² Sergei Biriukov. *Zevgma*, Moscow: Nauka, 1994, 15-16.

¹⁹³ «Теперь все это позабыто, / К другому движется народ. / За что мне нравится Никита, / Что он ноздрею мух не бьет.»

¹⁹⁴ Konstantin Vanshenkin. *Pisatel'skii klub*, Moscow: Vagrius, 1998, 266.

(and at that time still unpublished) poetry, which had not been forgotten. In addition to Glazkov's own efforts (he continued to distribute his early poems in samizdat books), they were actively propagated by his poetic peers, who cited them by heart to younger poets, who, in turn, became Glazkov's devoted fans. One of them, Evgenii Evtushenko, would recall:

When I first stumbled upon Glazkov's poems, I literally raved about his lines, which could be memorized at once, effortlessly: so easily did they strike a chord in one's heart...¹⁹⁵

Another admirer of Glazkov's early poetry, Vladimir Komilov, expressed his feelings in verse:

... Потому обожаю Глазкова,
Не похожего ни на кого...¹⁹⁶

(...Therefore I worship Glazkov,
Who is unlike anyone else...)

Although Glazkov's best verses had been written in the 1930s and 40s, they were still more influential than much more recent poetic productions created by his fellow authors, – and not only by the mediocre ones, but even by the most talented of them. This, actually, is the point of Boris Slutskii's poem entitled "Kolia Glazkov" (1973):

...Кто спустился к большим успехам,
А кого – поминай как звали!
Только он никуда не съехал.
Он остался на перевале.

Он остался на перевале.
Обогнали? Нет, обогнули.
Сколько мы у него воровали,
А всего мы не утянули.

Скинемся, товарищи, что ли?
Каждый пусть по камешку выдаст!
И поставим памятник Коле.
Пусть его при жизни увидит.¹⁹⁷

(Some descended to big successes,
Others vanished into thin air!

¹⁹⁵ "Skomorokh i bogatyr'," 406.

¹⁹⁶ Cited in his interview with Tatiana Bek. *Voprosy literatury*, no. 1 (1992): 333.

¹⁹⁷ *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 3, 245-246.

He was the only one who did not relocate anywhere.
He remained at the mountain pass.

He remained at the mountain pass.
Did we surpass him? No, we just skirted him.
We stole so much from him,
But haven't pinched everything he had.

Why don't we make a purse for him together?
Let us everybody pull out a little stone!
Thus, we will erect a monument to Kolia,
Let him see it while he is still living.)

Indeed, many of "Kolia's" poetic peers as well as the poets of a younger generation were indebted to Glazkov. For example, Glazkov's line "doroga daleka" (from "Stepan Kumyrskii") was used by Aleksandr Mezhirov for the title of his first book, printed in 1947.¹⁹⁸ Glazkov's image «сороковые-роковые» (from "По glazkovskim mestam") was employed by David Samoilov in his most well-known piece "Sorokovye."¹⁹⁹ Some of Glazkov's intonations, in particular the one used in the above-cited "V Peredelkine u Pasternaka," were adopted by Boris Slutskii. And last, but not least, a close echo of Glazkov's poem written in the 1940s («– Молчи, семья, – / Сказала стая: / – В тебе семь Я, / Во мне до ста Я!...»²⁰⁰) can be found in Andrei Voznesenskii's piece «Я – семья. / Во мне как в спектре / живут семь я...»²⁰¹

Yet Glazkov's influence on these and some other successful Soviet poets was not as profound as is still widely believed: the strong anti-utopian pathos of his early poetry, which manifested itself in ironic play with official clichés, was generally alien to "publishable" authors. This Glazkovian feature, as well as some of his other characteristic traits, made his poetry especially important for authors who refused to submit to the state's political and aesthetical demands and instead chose to stay in the literary underground.

¹⁹⁸ Aleksandr Mezhirov. *Doroga daleka*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1947.

¹⁹⁹ See David Samoilov. *Stikhotvoreniia*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985, 43.

²⁰⁰ *Izbrannoe*, 468.

²⁰¹ Andrei Voznesenskii. *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 1, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984, 167.

CHAPTER II. RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE IN THE 1950s AND BEYOND: THE THAW GENERATION

AFTER STALIN

Although by the end of the 1940s, the experimental tradition seemed to have died out completely (even Glazkov finally surrendered to the enormous political pressure exerted by the state), its revival began immediately after Stalin's death in 1953 and the ensuing liberalization of the regime. In the middle of the 1950s, a number of young poets emerged, who showed genuine interest in the early Russian avant-garde as represented by Khlebnikov, Maiakovskii, and Kruchenykh. The constant official denigration and belittling of Futurism had failed to suppress interest in the movement, most likely because access to the Futurist oeuvre had never been completely cut off. As Lev Losev noted, the canonization of Maiakovskii "had left a crack in the wall that was missed by the 'comrades'," and which enabled young readers to become acquainted with the avant-garde texts of the beginning of the century:

In 1947 and 1950 Soviet students read not only "Verses about my Soviet Passport," but also the poems "Man," "A Cloud in Trousers," and afterwards they set off on risky journeys through incompletely purged libraries, second-hand bookstores, and fleamarkets, where wild books by Burliuk and Kruchenykh passed as cheap junk. Thus from Maiakovskii they moved on to Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, and then returned via Zabolotskii and the OBERIU.²⁰²

After Stalin's death this path seemed no longer to guarantee one a prison sentence or death, although it was certainly not approved by the Soviet authorities. As before, experimental art, especially in its radical manifestations, was labeled "formalism" and did not have any real access to the official press. Thus the majority of young poets who chose to work within the avant-garde tradition consciously made the decision to confine themselves to the literary underground, where they largely remained until the final collapse of the regime. Their literary activities were reduced, for the most part, to

²⁰² Lev Losev, "Tulupy my," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 14 (1995): 209. The earlier version of this article was published in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 141-149.

readings of poetry in each other's apartments,²⁰³ producing samizdat collections, and occasional publications abroad – in émigré journals, almanacs, and anthologies. Underground verses appeared in such editions as *Novyi zhurnal*, *Grani*, *Kovcheg*, *Apollon - 77*, *A-IA*, and – ultimately – in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology of Modern Russian Poetry* (1980-86).²⁰⁴ The latter was the first attempt to put into print a comprehensive collection of samizdat poetry that had been produced in Soviet Union since the mid-1950s.²⁰⁵ This truly grandiose venture was initiated and executed by the Leningrad underground poet Konstantin Kuzminsky, who emigrated to the United States in 1975. As a co-editor, Kuzminsky designated his compatriot Grigorii Kovalev, who remained in Leningrad, but whose role in the project was no less crucial. He was almost totally blind and lived on a small disability pension, devoting all of his time to collecting and copying (with the help of others) samizdat poetry. Thanks to his efforts, hundreds of remarkable poetic texts did not sink into oblivion and were eventually published in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*.²⁰⁶

All the texts in the anthology were in Russian (which might have imposed certain difficulties for Western readers), but the editor struggled to provide some information about each of the numerous authors, and to arrange materials in a more or less systematic and chronological fashion.²⁰⁷

The revival of the experimental tradition is believed to have begun at the Philology Department of Leningrad State University, and this happened even before the

²⁰³ There was a short-lived practice of public poetry readings in Moscow's Maiakovskii Square, which was started by young fans of poetry in the late summer of 1960. Anyone could come and read poems (his own or by other authors) to a huge crowd, which used to gather around the Maiakovskii monument on weekend evenings. Although nothing that could be considered openly anti-Soviet ever happened during these readings (it was no secret that the crowd was saturated with KGB agents), the authorities put a ban on these gatherings at the end of 1961. See about this Ludmila Polikovskaia, *My predchuvstvie, predtecha... Ploshchad' Maiakovskogo 1958-1965*, Moscow: Zven'ia, 1997.

²⁰⁴ About this anthology see Vladislav Kulakov, "A professorov, polagaiu, nado veshat'," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 14 (1995): 200-208.

²⁰⁵ The anthology features very small number of texts created before the 1950s.

²⁰⁶ About Grigorii Kovalev see *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 23-28.

²⁰⁷ Kuzminsky used in this work various émigré and samizdat sources. Undoubtedly, the most important of them was *Antologiiia sovetskoi patologii* published in samizdat in 1962 by Kuzminsky, Kovalev, and few other enthusiasts. They put under one cover all the non-traditional and ingenious poetic texts that had been read aloud or circulated in manuscripts at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s. Altogether the collection included more than one hundred poems. See on this matter *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 21; Krivulin, "Zolotoi vek samizdata," 351.

death of Stalin.²⁰⁸ In the fall of 1952 several 18-year-old freshmen, including Mikhail Krasil'nikov and Iurii Mikhailov, proclaimed themselves “Neofuturists” and Khlebnikov – their primary teacher. They even managed to put together two miscellanies, one of which was entitled *Brynza* and the other *S'edim brynzu*. Although these miscellanies have not survived, it is known that they included polemics, articles, and some poetry by members of the group.

Strangely enough, the appearance of these miscellanies went completely unnoticed, and scandal broke out only after the same group of freshmen decided to arrange a public event (an act of almost unimaginable daring at the time). In December 1952, Mikhail Krasil'nikov and Iurii Mikhailov, together with a few friends, dressed in traditional Russian shirts and bast sandals, sat on the floor in the University lobby and began to gulp down traditional Russian *tiuria* made with *kvass* and to sing Khlebnikov's poems.²⁰⁹ After this action Mikhailov and Krasil'nikov were immediately dismissed from the University, where they were reinstated only after Stalin's death, which, fortunately for them, occurred three months later.²¹⁰ According to an eyewitness, their response to the reinstatement took an appropriately “avant-garde” form – they wrote a narrative poem consisting of 150 lines of palindromes.²¹¹

Most of Mikhailov's and Krasil'nikov's poems were written in the mid-1950s, and they circulated widely among the University students. However, only a very small number of these texts have survived. Some of them would appear later in the first volume of *The Blue Lagoon Anthology* (1980). In Russia, Mikhailov and Krasil'nikov were

²⁰⁸ See Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata,” 349; Losev “Tulupy my,” 209-210; Vladimir Ufliand, “Neofuturist s gusinyim perom,” *Aurora*, no. 10 (1991): 43.

²⁰⁹ The exact date of this event has provoked certain controversy. Krivulin places this event in December of 1951 (“Zolotoi vek samizdata,” 349), while Ufliand and Losev date it December of 1952 (“Neofuturist s gusinyim perom,” 43; “Tulupy my,” 209-210). The latter date seems to be more plausible.

²¹⁰ See Ufliand, “Neofuturist s gusinyim perom,” 43; Losev, “Tulupy my,” 210-211; Krivulin, “Zolotoi vek samizdata,” 249. This punishment, however, looked rather “mild” by the standards of the time, and can probably be attributed to the “Russophile” nature of the happening.

²¹¹ Losev quotes two lines from that poem from memory: “Ezdil gogolem smelo Goglidze” and “Voliu Kremlia mial Merkulov” (“Tulupy my,” 211). It seems that the same poem was also mentioned by Leonid Chertkov in his letter to Valentin Khromov of July 13, 1958: “<...> As far as palindromes are concerned, the greatest of them all (without exaggeration) I heard from my pal from Leningrad Mishka Krasil'nikov. It was very long, with an elaborate plot, very logical, without any artificial turns, and ended with the line: Аврук лес сел, курва! <...>” (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92).

published for the first time only at the beginning of the 1990s, when several of their poems appeared in the literary monthly *Aврора*.²¹² These poems bear clear signs of Futurist influence, primarily that of Khlebnikov. Here, for instance, is Mikhailov's poem "Chaane" (1956) based on skillful euphonic play:

Чаанэ – застенчива,
 Чаанэ – отчаянна,
 Чаанэ – изменчива
 и необычайна.
 Зубы как жемчужины,
 брови – дуги сужены,
 черезчур
 черна.
 Днем она лучу женой,
 вечером не хуже, но –
 вы –
 чур –
 на!...²¹³

(Chaane is shy,
 Chaane is audacious
 Chaane is changeable
 and extraordinary.
 Her teeth are like pearls
 eyebrows – arches of destiny,
 she is too
 black.
 In the daytime she is a ray's wife,
 and she is as good at night,
 just too
 pre-
 ten-
 tious!..)

Krasil'nikov's poems are characterized not only by his strong predilection for compound rhymes in the style of Khlebnikov, but also by his clear affinity with the absurd in the spirit of Kruchenykh. One of his poems dated 1955 shows this convincingly:

Хочу узнать тоскует вол о ком,
 Идя один на водопой,

²¹² See Iurii Mikhailov, *Aврора*, no. 10 (1991): 45-49; Mikhail Krasil'nikov, *Aврора*, no. 10 (1990): 82-83.

²¹³ *Aврора*, no.10 (1991): 45-46. Krasil'nikov's poems can also be found in *Samizdat veka*, 457-458.

Когда его потащит волоком
Словак убогий и скупой.

Им все равно – тяжелый груз ли
Нести куда-то по приказу.
Сердца унылых заскорузли,
Восславив горе и проказу.

Но славен истого искусства лик –
Увечный телом оживает.
Они вели вола без устали
Туда, где вежа межевая...²¹⁴

(I would like to know for whom the ox is longing
Going along to a water hole,
When he will be dragged by a Slovak,
A squalid and greedy fellow.

They don't care if a heavy load
To be carried somewhere on someone's order.
The hearts of the downcast have hardened,
Glamorizing sorrow and leprosy.

May the image of ardent art be glorified –
He who is maimed revives.
They lead the ox relentlessly
To the end where the boundary strip lies...)

Soon after their reinstatement at the University, Mikhailov and Krasil'nikov became poetic mentors for a group of freshmen who entered the Philology Department in 1954. This group included Leonid Vinogradov, Sergei Kulle, Vladimir Ufliand, Mikhail Eremin, Aleksei Lifshits (he would later adopt the pen-name Lev Losev), and Aleksandr Kondratov. Like their "elder brothers," Mikhailov and Krasil'nikov, they were interested mainly in Khlebnikov's innovations and the poetry of absurd.²¹⁵ All of these poets would later appear in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology* united under the title "Philologicheskaja shkola."²¹⁶

A major blow for the group was the detention of Mikhail Krasil'nikov for participating in a protest against the invasion of Hungary by Soviet troops in 1956. This

²¹⁴ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t.1, 157. See also *Samizdat veka*, 455.

²¹⁵ Two members of the group, Lev Losev and Sergei Kulle, appear to have been relatively uninfluenced by Futurism. For that reason their poetry will not be discussed here.

²¹⁶ See *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 139-265.

protest was held on the Dvortsovaia Plaza on November 7, 1956, during the official celebration of the October Revolution.²¹⁷ Losev recollected that Krasil'nikov "marched among banners and portraits of the Party leaders and yelled: 'Free Hungary!' and something else of that kind."²¹⁸ He was arrested and sentenced to four years of incarceration, which he served in Mordoviia.

When Krasil'nikov was imprisoned, his place as an informal leader of the group was taken over by Leonid Vinogradov (b.1936), who enjoyed special popularity among the poets of the Philology Department. According to Losev's account, Vinogradov wrote "little and briefly,"²¹⁹ and only a few of his epigrammatic pieces survive, preserved as epigraphs to the verse of his fellow-poets:

Мы фанатики, мы фонетики.
Не боимся мы кибернетики.²²⁰

(We are fanatics, we are phoneticists,
We are not afraid of cybernetics.)

And another:

Марусь!
Ты любишь Русь?²²¹

(Marus'!
Do you love Rus'? [Russia])

In his memoirs, Losev characterizes Vinogradov as a "serious, consistent master of the lyrical absurd," citing from memory the following stanza:

Одинаково серьезно
Вам предложат снять тулуп
И при входе в клуб колхозный,
И в любой английский клуб.²²²

(With the same seriousness
You will be asked to take off your sheepskin coat

²¹⁷ In his article "Zolotoi vek samizdata," Krivulin mistakenly attributes this action to Leonid Vinogradov (349).

²¹⁸ "Tulupy my," 212. After his release from the penitentiary, Krasil'nikov returned to his hometown Riga (Latviia), where he worked as a tour guide. See *Avrora*, no. 10 (1990): 82-83.

²¹⁹ "Tulupy my," 212.

²²⁰ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 155.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 155. More of Vinogradov's poems can be found in *Samizdat veka*, 458-460.

²²² "Tulupy my," 212.

At the entrance of a kolkhoz club
And at the entrance of any English club.)

Another member of the group, Vladimir Ufliand (b. 1937), can be also described as a “master of the lyrical absurd.” In contrast to Vinogradov, however, he did not favor the epigrammatic style, and his best poems had long, elaborate plots. Here is one of them, “Smert’ liubimoi” (1959):

Любимая скончалась незаметно.
Лежала горестная, тихая.
Болела.
Ах! Лучше б умерла Елизавета,
бельгийская старушка королева.
Бабуся мне не сделала худого,
но также и не сделала добра.
Мне б с нею даже было б неудобно
под ручку выйти со двора.
Тем более, на танцы, на каток.
Морщинистая, седенькая, хроменькая.
Ее бы сразу свел с ума поток
прохожих у кинотеатра «Хроника».
А в королевской форменной скуфейке,
в фамильных старомодных украшениях
от пирожка за сорок три копейки
старушка б отказалась с отвращением.
Возможно также, что она неграмотна.
И на ногах не туфельки, а пимы.
Ах! Все-таки, какая это драма:
нечаянная смерть любимой!²²³

(My loved one passed away imperceptibly.
She was lying there, sorrowful, quiet.
She had been seriously ill.

Ah! It would be better if Elizabeth died,
The Belgian little old lady-queen.

The little granny did not do anything bad to me,
But she did not do anything good, either.
I would even be embarrassed to take her arm
And to walk out of our courtyard with her.
Let alone to go to a dance, a skating rink.

²²³ Vladimir Ufliand. *Rifmovannyye uporiadochennyye teksty*, Sankt-Peterburg: Blits, 1997, 38.

Wrinkled, gray-headed, limping,
 She would go crazy as soon as she saw
 The traffic of pedestrians near
 The movie theater "Khronika."
 And in her regal uniform of a calotte,
 In her old-fashioned family jewelry,
 She would refuse with disgust
 To have a pie for forty-three kopecks.

Besides, it is quite possible that she is illiterate,
 And wears deerskin boots on her feet,
 Not little dress shoes.

Ah! What a tragedy it is after all:
 The unexpected death of a loved one!

In Ufliand's poetry the tendency towards primitivism inherited from Khlebnikov acquires the shape of the grotesque, which is softened by his special "simple-hearted" intonation and versatile vocabulary. These qualities make his poetic world so instantly recognizable that Iosif Brodsky wittily designated it "Ufliandiia."²²⁴ Characteristic traits of "Ufliandiia" are already clearly discernible in the poet's earliest verses and remain virtually unchanged over more than three decades. This can be seen in his first collection *Teksty 1955-1977* published by Ardis in 1978, as well as in subsequent ones, *Otbornye teksty* (1995) and *Rifmovannye uporiadochennye teksty* (1997), both of which would appear in the poet's own country in the post-Soviet era.

Despite his relatively low productivity, Ufliand enjoyed a kind of fame, which quickly spread beyond the University. His poems were appreciated in other poetic circles in Leningrad, in particular, by the so-called "Akhmatova's orphans" (Brodsky, Rein, Naiman, and Bobyshev).²²⁵ Ufliand also became rather well-known in Moscow, and his poems promptly appeared in the Moscow samizdat journal *Sintaksis*, published by Aleksandr Ginsburg in 1959-1960.²²⁶

The poetry of another participant of "Filologicheskaiia shkola," Mikhail Eremin (b. 1936), was also published in *Sintaksis*. As his early poems demonstrated, Eremin

²²⁴ See Iosif Brodsky, "Zametka dlia entsiklopedii," *Russkaia mysl'*, June 16, 1989.

²²⁵ For instance, Brodsky more than once mentioned Ufliand as one of his mentors. Losev offers his comments on these statements: "By the way, if Brodsky ever learned anything from Ufliand... it was most probably the easy handling of everyday discourse and the art of rhyme." ("Tulupy my," 214).

²²⁶ Later Ufliand's poems were regularly included in various poetic anthologies published abroad.

actively learned from the Futurists, consistently employing alliteration, inexact rhymes, and unexpected metaphors:

Так горсть земли искали иудей:
Топча поля в пыли безоблачной.
Идущие, как бороды редели
И падали в песок, как обручи.
Чтобы смягчилось сердце Моисеево,
Чтоб каравай земли попробовать,
Маис и просо сеяли
Братья бродячие, бредовые...²²⁷

(Thus Israelites were looking for a handful of soil,
Trampling fields in cloudless dust;
While striding, they thinned out like beards,
And fell down in the sand like barrel hoops;
To soften Moses' heart,
To taste the loaf of land,
They sowed corn and sorghum,
Roaming, daredevil brothers...)

Soon, however, Eremin became much more radical in his experimentation. This can be seen from his poems in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, as well as from his poetic collections published in the United States and later, in Russia.²²⁸ Beginning in the mid-1960s Eremin inserted into his poems mathematical formulas, Japanese hieroglyphs, words in ancient Greek and Hindi, Russian/English portmanteaux, and so forth. All his verses have rather *zaum* 'like quality, although Eremin provides copious footnotes in which (in contrast to Kruchenykh) he offers precise translations of foreign words. These experiments looked so promising that even Brodsky, whose attitude to this kind of poetry was lukewarm, appreciated the poet's creativity. In a phone interview Brodsky said, "Eremin's verse can be called Futurism in the sense that the future belongs to this sort of poetry."²²⁹

The Futurist predilection for puns and parody is particularly noticeable in the poems of Aleksandr Kondratov (1937-1993). According to Losev, Kondratov "parodied

²²⁷ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 212.

²²⁸ See Mikhail Eremin. *Stikhotvoreniia*, Tenafly: Ermitazh, 1986; *Stikhotvoreniia*, Moscow: Argo-Risk, 1996; *Stikhotvoreniia*, Sankt-Petersburg: Pushkinskii Fond, 1998.

²²⁹ See Eremin. *Stikhotvoreniia*, 1986, 152.

all of Russian literature, and also Russian literary scholarship, and then, on top of it, some of world literature as well.”²³⁰ Following the Futurist example, Kondratov took a keen pleasure in parodying Pushkin, particularly the poet’s saccharine official image. He brought these poems in the lengthy poetic cycle, “Pushkinoty: Panto-Pushkin,” published in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*. The poem “Pushkinskie atributy” is one of them:

Ножки – Пушкину!
 Кружку – Пушкину!
 Душку – Пушкину!
 Стружку – Пушкину...
 Пушку – Пушкину.
 Пышку – Пушкину.
 Ушко – Пушкину.
 Крошку – Пушкину.
 Плюшку – Пушкину.
 Чушку – Пушкину.
 Мушку – Пушкину.
 Крышку – Пушкину!²³¹

((Ladies] little feet – to Pushkin!
 A tankard – to Pushkin!
 A sweetie – to Pushkin!
 A shaving– to Pushkin...
 A cannon – to Pushkin.
 A dumpling – to Pushkin.
 A little ear – to Pushkin.
 A little one – to Pushkin.
 A bun – to Pushkin.
 A piglet – to Pushkin.
 A little fly – to Pushkin.
 A lid – to Pushkin!)

The last line is a pun. It alludes to the idiom “ему крышка” (it’s all up with him), and therefore can be translated as “Pushkin kaput.” This pun effectively concludes a poem that targets the innumerable scholarly studies, which caused more harm than good to Pushkin’s poetic reputation.

Among his fellow Neofuturists, Kondratov (who is also known by the pseudonym

²³⁰ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t.1, 148-149.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

“Sandy Konrad”) was distinguished by his prolific output and his tireless search for new forms of poetic expression.²³² He was often ahead of the times in his experiments, anticipating tendencies that would only appear decades later in the works of others.²³³ Many of Kondratov’s verse productions of the 1950s look amazingly “postmodern,” for example, “Akrostikh” (Acrostic):

A
K
P
O
C
T
H
X²³⁴

Although the Leningrad group of Neofuturists was probably the first to emerge after Stalin’s death, it was soon followed by other groups of a similar aesthetic orientation, which sprung up in Moscow. As Losev puts it, “In Moscow, we considered Krasovitskii, Chertkov, Khromov, and later Saggir and Kholin to be in the same league as us.”²³⁵

Saggir and Kholin were members of the so-called “Lianozovo group,” while Krasovitskii, Chertkov, and Khromov formed the so-called “Chertkov group,” which became active in the mid-1950s. The latter group’s meetings were held in the apartment of Galina Andreeva, a student at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages. Other members of the group, Stanislav Krasovitskii, Valentin Khromov, as well as Andrei Sergeev, were also from the same Institute, although their acknowledged leader, Leonid Chertkov, attended the Institute of Library Science.²³⁶ Chertkov was a frequent visitor to the Lenin Library, where he copied out by hand works of early twentieth-century poetry.

²³² See Kondratov’s poems in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology* as well as in *Avrora*, no. 12 (1990), and *Zvezda*, no. 5 (1991); no. 8 (1993).

²³³ See Genrikh Saggir’s preface to Kondratov’s poems in *Samizdat veka*, 461.

²³⁴ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 251.

²³⁵ “Tulupy my,” 214.

²³⁶ For more about the Chertkov’s group, see Andrei Sergeev, “Mansarda oknami na zapad,” in Vladislav Kulakov, *Poezia kak fact*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999, 340-351. Also, see Kulakov, “Kak eto nachinalos’,” *Novyi mir*, no. 4 (1994): 100-113; Andrei Sergeev “Al’bom dlia marok” in his book *Omnibus*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1997.

These works were then discussed at the meetings of the group, where the preference, according to one source, was given to Futurist poetry.²³⁷

The members of the group actively sought out the surviving avant-garde authors of the older generation, in particular Nikolai Zabolotskii, to whom they sent their writings for evaluation. Zabolotskii's comments, although somewhat unflattering, were faithfully recorded by Khromov:

I spoke to N.A. Zabolotskii over the phone.

– It is very good that you are not satisfied with conventional, official verse. You remind me some of the early Futurists. I can't say that your poetry is bad. You just haven't written any, and your experiments only pretend to be real poetry. I wish you success in your experiments.²³⁸

The young poets managed to establish a closer relationship with Aseev, who seemed to show a genuine interest in their work. As they would recall later, he offered them practical support, including monetary donations.²³⁹ Some of the group members visited Aseev on a regular basis, although their attitude towards him was slightly ironic (obviously, he was too "Soviet" for their taste). In Aseev's home they met Kruchenykh, who immediately singled out Stanislav Krasovitskii. Kruchenykh even asked the latter to write something in his special album, which he kept for eulogies to himself and which contained the autographs of numerous celebrities. In response, Krasovitskii wrote down the poem "Madrigal to Kruchenykh" as an expression of his admiration for the older poet's innovations. "Madrigal" is based on a witty play on words, which unfortunately eludes translation:

...Не в фарисеях славен он
Но всей Рассеи нравит он
Среди котов учоных
И среди рифм сеченых
Наш Алексей Звучоных...²⁴⁰

²³⁷ See Saggir, in *Samizdat veka*, 388.

²³⁸ Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92.

²³⁹ Valentin Khromov, in particular, recollected that Aseev would call him to ask: "Well, have you written anything new?" If the answer was "Yes," he would say: "Show it to me." He would read the poem and, if he liked it, he would pay me one ruble per line. At that time, it was an excellent rate. Only the so-called "thick" literary journals paid that much. ("My vseгда zanimalis' tol'ko iskusstvom," in *Poezia kak fakt*, 357).

²⁴⁰ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t.1, 82.

In contrast to the Leningrad Neofuturists, the Chertkov group did not publicize the debt they owed to Futurism. They only admitted their Western orientation, although most of the members had learned a great deal from the Futurists.²⁴¹ Even Chertkov (1933-2000), who, as is widely believed, generally followed in the poetic footsteps of Gumilev and Tikhonov, displayed a penchant for shocking “futuristic” gestures, combined with aggressive naturalism:

...значит, мне 19, а 20 исполнится,
я познаю новое наслаждение –
мочиться в подъезде своей любовницы.²⁴²

(...So, I'm 19, going on 20,
and I am learning a new pleasure,
to urinate in my lover's doorway.)

The same trait was even more pronounced in Chertkov's later poems, written in 1956-57, which demonstrate, in addition, a strong interest in *zaum*'. Not accidentally, the poet brought these poems together under the title “RIUKHI,” an exotic Russian word that describes an old outdoor game. All of “RIUKHI” are saturated with neologisms and weird twists of logic, as in “Dar” (1957):

Я вынянчил в печи личинку пирога –
Кому как не тебе отведать оторочку,–
Напрячь коровяка по клину сапога
И насосать назьмом зияющую бочку.

Дымящее казло печатал дыракол,
Сложив сухой дындып, я сделал ноги блянбой,–
Здрав до головы горошковый подол,
Она в густых кустах тебе дала за дамбой.

А чокнутый Чикун, треща, как медный гвоздь,
Готовил сикунa в своей вонючей спальне.

²⁴¹ Only two members of the group, Sergeev and Andreeva, appeared to be uninfluenced by the Futurists, although the former “was brought up on the Futurists, and his major love afterwards was Pasternak” (“Mansarda oknami na zapad,” 343). Sergeev (1933-1998) later became a well-known translator of British and American poetry. Galina Andreeva, who did not pursue a literary career, wrote in a style akin to that of the early Akhmatova: «Вот и прожили мы свои вечера, / к песням старым возврата нет. / На свиданье в девятом часу утра / так невесело ехать мне.» (Here we are, we have outlasted our evenings, / There is no return to old songs. / It is rather sad for me / To go on a date shortly after eight in the morning). Cited in Sergeev, *Omnibus*, 306.

²⁴² From Chertkov's narrative poem “Itogi” (1954), cited by Sergeev in “Mansarda oknami na zapad,” 342. In Chertkov's collection *Ognepark*, published in Cologne in 1987, these lines appeared in a different version.

И лапидарная слеза, – горючий гость,
Как ссаки натекла в отверстие готовальни.²⁴³

(I nursed in the stove the larva of the pie –
Who else but you should taste its rim, –
Flex some dung along the wedge of a high boot
And fill up the wide-open barrel with shit.

The paper-puncher printed smoking kazlo,
I piled up dry dyndyp and crossed my legs blianba-wise.
While she lifted her polka-dotted skirt up to the head
And put out for you behind the dam.

Meanwhile, crazy Chikun, cracking like a copper nail,
Readied his prick in his stinky bedroom.
And a terse tear, a bitter guest,
Dropped like piss in the orifice of the drawing case.)

The preference for extravagant images was typical of another member of the Chertkov group, Valentin Khromov (b. 1932). One of his most memorable stanzas reads:

И верный любовник своей лесбиянки
Выходит тошнить по утрам,
Из драной спины вынимая дранки
Уснувших в подъезде ламп.²⁴⁴

(And the faithful lover of his lesbian partner
Comes out to puke in the morning,
Drawing from his ragged back the lathing
Of the light bulbs that sleep in the doorway).

Still, Khromov's most unique feature was his taste for palindromes, which recalls Khlebnikov's famous experiments, above all, his narrative poem "Razin" (1920). This work, which was written entirely in palindromes, changed the status of this device in Russian poetry. "Palindrome... Apparently, a joke, a game... Read from right to left or from left to right, it comes out the same. No black magic, just prestidigitation. Such was, more or less, the attitude towards the palindrome before the giant Khlebnikov emerged."

²⁴³ Cited in Chertkov's letter to Khromov of July 13, 1958 (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92). A slightly different version of this poem was later published in *Ognepark* (1987).

²⁴⁴ Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92. This very stanza was praised by Chertkov in his letter to Khromov of June 26, 1958: "...In any case, I liked the fragments of the poems more than the whole thing. – particularly, the stanza 'And the faithful lover of his lesbian partner...'" (*Ibid.*)

stated Kruchenykh.²⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, Khromov was the first among the poets of his generation to realize the full potential of the device.²⁴⁶ As his palindromes demonstrate, he quickly acquired significant level of artistry in this craft. The miniature poem, “Koty pytok,” entrances the reader with its economy of expression:

ткт
око в око
тут как тут²⁴⁷

“K itogu gotik,” a longer piece, also deserves to be mentioned here. Khromov managed to endow some of his palindromes with rhymes and rhythm, and this quality, as their first reader and critic, Leonid Chertkov, noted, made these experiments especially interesting:²⁴⁸

гой ног
индусу дни
готик итог
кинъте в цветник.

чи вера царевич
восток отцов
чи деньги Гнедич
в омут умов.

на пищу щипан
каракуль лука рак
на пузе везу пан
кармана мрак.

не морг огромен
в оспе псов
не диво виден
восток отцов.

нам бань обман
и мечь семьи

²⁴⁵ Aleksei Kruchenykh. *15 let russkogo futurisma*, Moscow: Izdanie Vserossiiskogo Soiuza Poetov, 1928, 18.

²⁴⁶ See Khromov’s letter to Chertkov of February 15, 1958, in which he discusses Khlebnikov’s palindromes: “<...> Once Andrei [Sergeev] or someone else, speaking of the ‘fragmented quality’ of Velemir’s poetry, said that ‘rop por’ is a complete failure in comparison to ‘[мы] низари летели Разиным’ and similar lines. I can’t agree with that; the line might be simple or ordinary, but it is not shallow at all.” (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92).

²⁴⁷ Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92.

²⁴⁸ Letter to Khromov of June 26, 1958. (*Ibid.*)

на в лоб болван
ими²⁴⁹

Khromov's most important contribution to the genre was a play, "Potop, ili Ada Iliada," which was only recently published in *Samizdat veka*. As one scholar has suggested, the play is likely to occupy an honored place after Khlebnikov's "Razin" in future anthologies of palindromic poetry.²⁵⁰

Another enthusiastic follower of the Futurist tradition was Stanislav Krasovitskii (b.1935). He was not only the most important figure in the Chertkov group, but, as many believe, in the whole generation of poets that emerged in the 1950s.²⁵¹ Krasovitskii began as a disciple of the early Maiakovskii, but he had largely outgrown this influence even before joining Chertkov and others. By the mid-1950s Krasovitskii seemed more interested in Khlebnikov's and Kruchenykh's innovations, which inspired in him a love for neologisms, unconventional syntax, and various types of *zaum'*. As his poems in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology* demonstrate, Krasovitskii was fond of exuberant experimentation with these devices, although in his best pieces he uses them in a much more subtle fashion. He gently blends them into his own, very distinctive surrealist vision, which palpably differed from that of his predecessors: Kruchenykh with his absurdist compositions, Khlebnikov with his childlike dreams, and Maiakovskii with his neurotic grotesqueries:

На пороге, где пляшет змея и земля –
Кровавое дерево следа.
Я вижу уходит через поля
Немая фигура соседа.

А волны стоят в допотопном ряду,
И сеется пыль мукомола.
Старуха копается в желтом саду,
Отвернутая от пола.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* More of Khromov's palindromes can be found in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 257-260.

²⁵⁰ Kulakov, "Kak eto nachinalos'," 103.

²⁵¹ See, for example, Kuzminsky's preface to Krasovitskii's poems in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 70. See also Krivulin's preface to Krasovitskii's poems in *Oktiabr'*, no. 4 (1991): 137. Among the admirers of Krasovitskii's talent were Akhmatova, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, Victor Shklovskii, Iosif Brodsky, and also some of the most prominent poets of his own generation. "Krasovitskii's poetry was for us the only thing that could strengthen our spirit," Gennadii Aigi would recall later. ("Poet – eto nesostoiavshiisia sviatoi..." *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5-6 (1998): 16-17).

Что надо ей там?
 Но приемник молчит,
 И тихо,
 По самому краю
 Уходит за море соседский бандит,
 Закутавшись тенью сарая.²⁵²

(On the threshold, where serpent and soil are dancing,
 There is a tree made of bloody footsteps.
 I watch the silent silhouette of my neighbor
 Walk away through the fields.

Waves stand frozen in an antediluvian row,
 Dust pours from the miller's wheel.
 An old woman is digging in the yellow garden,
 Her back turned to her household chores.

What does she seek there?
 The radio is silent,
 And quietly,
 Creeping along the very edge,
 The neighboring thug flees overseas,
 Wrapping himself in the shadow of the barn.)

The poem's eschatological flavor is very typical of Krasovitskii, and this, in turn, distinguishes the poet from his primary influences. Futurist social utopianism was totally foreign to Krasovitskii, who scarcely anticipated any kind of radiant future. On the contrary, he was obsessed with tragic premonitions, the most persistent of which was nuclear catastrophe. It is an underlying theme in a number of his poems, which are now read as prophecies of the Chernobyl accident and similar disasters.²⁵³

Krasovitskii's poetic voice continued to develop, but at the beginning of the 1960s he abruptly ceased all of his poetic activity. He became aware of a religious vocation and began studying for the priesthood.²⁵⁴ He renounced all his early poems and even tried to destroy everything he had written. Copies preserved by some of his friends and fans were the source for all of the few existing publications of Krasovitskii's

²⁵² *Samizdat veka*, 389-390.

²⁵³ See Saggir in *ibid.*, 389.

²⁵⁴ Krivulin, *Oktiabr'*, no. 4 (1991): 137. On Krasovitskii's poetry see also Kulakov, "Kak eto nachinalos'," 106-112.

poems.²⁵⁵

Even before Krasovitskii decided to change his life so drastically, the Chertkov group had ceased to exist. The end came in January 1957, as a result of the arrest and detention of Leonid Chertkov on charges of “anti-Soviet propaganda.” Apparently, the KGB had been keeping an eye on the group for some time, and, as Andrei Sergeev would later explain, Chertkov was “the center, the axis of the group, and they pulled him away so that the circle would disintegrate.”²⁵⁶

Chertkov was sent to Mordoviia, but even in the labor camp he managed to stay in touch with former group members, corresponding with them on a regular basis. Quite amazingly, the hardship of everyday day survival did not suppress Chertkov’s acute interest in art and poetry. In his letters he focused almost exclusively on cultural and literary matters, sharing with his correspondents his exceptional knowledge of the first Russian avant-garde, as well as information on its last surviving exponents, whom he made every effort to track down.²⁵⁷

Chertkov’s erudition, along with his keen literary taste, made him an excellent critic of poetry. His letters are full of insightful comments on the works of poets who happened to be of interest to him. Among these were Aseev,²⁵⁸ Slutskii, Glazkov, Kseniia Nekrasova, and the Leningrad Neofuturists, with whom Chertkov had an unexpected opportunity to familiarize himself in the labor camp. The Neofuturists’ former leader, Mikhail Krasil’nikov, served his sentence in the same labor camp as Chertkov, and he

²⁵⁵ See *Kovcheg*, no. 2 (1977); *Grani*, no. 52 (1962); *Apollon-77* (Paris); *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, and later, the literary monthly *Oktiabr*, no. 4 (1991), an appendix to Kulakov’s article “Kak eto nachinalos’,” and *Samizdat veka*.

²⁵⁶ “Mansarda oknami na zapad,” 350.

²⁵⁷ See Chertkov’s letter to Khromov of June 26, 1958: “<...> You’d better go and visit Chicherin Aleksei Nikolaevich sometime (there is one Vas[ilievi]ch, but this is another person), he may die at any moment. He is the one from ‘Mena vsekh,’ you should remember. He lives somewhere near the Rizhskii railroad station. Inquire at the city directory. He must be around 60 years old, born in Kharkov, as far as I know <...>” (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92).

²⁵⁸ Here are Chertkov’s comments on one of Aseev’s latest works: “<...> What new poems by Nik[olai] Nik[olae]vich [Aseev] have you seen? With his insatiable tendency to plagiarize, he, who once introduced the Kursk region and almost 300 novel rhymes to Russian poetry, now uses ‘Igorveve-vygorelo,’ taken from Khlebnikov <...>” (Letter to Khromov of January 11, 1960; *Ibid.*)

provided the latter with copies of poems by Eremin, Ufliand, Vinogradov, and others.²⁵⁹

Quite understandably, Chertkov was especially concerned with the poetic development of his correspondents – Krasovitskii, Khromov, and Sergeev – and always looked forward to reading their new works.²⁶⁰ In his letters Chertkov analyzed these poems thoroughly, trying to give helpful, constructive advice. His friends continually asked him to send his own verses, but Chertkov was barely able to produce anything in the labor camp. As he explained to Khromov,

<...> Even as a free man I wrote little, and here, naturally, I write even less, because the range of my impressions has narrowed dramatically. In the beginning it was very painful. But by now I have got used to it in a way...²⁶¹

Chertkov sent his correspondents poems he had written before his detention, which formed the cycle “RIUKHI” and which he obviously considered to be his true achievement.²⁶² Undoubtedly this was so, but “RIUKHI” appeared to be Chertkov’s last poetic accomplishment. The poems he wrote later (either in prison or afterwards) were not only few in number but upsettingly bland. Chertkov’s remarkable talent had deserted him: five long years in the labor camp had taken their toll.²⁶³

Chertkov’s arrest and imprisonment clearly demonstrated that participation in an informal literary circle remained a risky enterprise. Surprisingly enough, not everyone was intimidated. This was particularly true in the case of the poets Genrich Sapgir, Igor

²⁵⁹ See Chertkov’s letter of September 3, 1958: “Mishka [Krasil’nikov] ... gave me a bunch of poems from Leningrad – and Eremin is better than others – ‘Bokovitye zerna,’ for example, although it is very Khlebnikov-like. Have you read the article about him? (He is better than his fellow Leningraders not just in particular, but in general – because of his orientation). <...> Along with poetry they produce drawings, Eremin’s works are not bad at all, Ufliand’s are in a similar style, but not as interesting <...>” (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 92).

²⁶⁰ See, for example, his letter to Khromov of August 3, 1957: “<...> Your letter made me happy with Stas’ [Krasovitskii] and your poems. I received Stas’ letter a bit earlier; it contained ‘Astry,’ which impressed me greatly. I have also received some of Sergeev’s poems, but they were not that good.” (*Ibid.*)

²⁶¹ Letter to Khromov of June 26, 1958. (*Ibid.*)

²⁶² See Chertkov’s own comments on these poems: “I worked an awful lot in this manner, probably it was the most natural thing for me to do, or maybe it was just inertia.” (*Ibid.*)

²⁶³ See his collection *Ognepark* (1987). Chertkov emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1973; he lived in Vienna, Paris, and Cologne, occasionally teaching at universities. His scholarly works, which focus on the Russian avant-garde as well, include: Vladimir Narbut. *Izbrannye stikhi, podgotovka teksta, vstupitel’naia stat’ia i primechaniia Leonida Chertkova*, Paris: La Press Libre, 1983; Konstantin Vaginov. *Sobranie stikhotvorenii, sostavlenie, posleslovie i primechaniia Leonida Chertkova; predislovie V. Kazaka*, München: O. Sagner in Kommission, 1982.

Kholin, and Vsevolod Nekrasov, who gathered around Evgenii Kropivnitskii, a writer and artist of the older generation. By the end of the 1950s they often met in the apartment of Kropivnitskii's daughter Valentina and her husband Oscar Rabin, both of whom were unofficial artists.²⁶⁴ At that time, the Rabins lived in Lianozovo, an industrial village near Moscow, and this is why the KGB, which diligently monitored their activities, described the participants in these gatherings as the "Lianozovo group."²⁶⁵ Later art historians and critics came to use this term as well, although the artists and poets in question never considered themselves a formal group. As Igor Kholin explained in one of his interviews, "there was just a bunch of poets and artists, all of them, by the way, quite diverse in style, who got together and befriended each other."²⁶⁶

Of course, they had some aesthetic ground in common, which led them to admire the writings of Evgenii Kropivnitskii (1893-1979), who worked in a primitivist manner suffused with marked irony. His style has been defined as "concrete realism," and it distantly resembles that of the OBERIU members, who were almost unknown in the 1940s and 50s:

Был он юный и влюбленный,
Подарил ей нитку бус.
Ярким счастьем упоенный
Он попал под автобус.

Говорили: как попал он?!
И росла, росла толпа...
Окровавленный лежал он
У трамвайного столба.²⁶⁷

(He was young and in love,
He presented her with a string of beads.
Thrilled by his exuberant happiness,
He was hit by a bus.

²⁶⁴ In addition, they dared to host private art exhibits, where they showed their paintings, as well as those of three other unofficial artists who lived nearby – Vladimir Nemukhin, Lidiia Masterkova, and Nikolai Vechtomov (see Kulakov "Lianozovo," in his *Poeziia kak fact*, 11).

²⁶⁵ This term emerged in 1963, when Evgenii Kropivnitskii was expelled from the Union of Soviet Artists on the grounds of "formalism." He was accused of being one of the organizers of the "Lianozovo group," which included, besides Kropivnitskii's family members, the poets and artists mentioned above. (*Ibid.*, 11).

²⁶⁶ "My vseгда iskhodili iz real'nosti," in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fact*, 320.

²⁶⁷ Cited by Sapgir in "Vzgliad v upor" in *Ibid.*, 324.

People asked, how did it happen?
 And the crowd just grew and grew...
 He lay all bloody
 Next to the tram stop).

Genrikh Sapgir would later recall that Kropivnitskii's poetry made a profound impression on him when he first read it in the mid-1940s. He had never come across anything like it before, but it gave him a clear idea of how poetry should sound.²⁶⁸ In fact, it was not just Kropivnitskii's ironic style that struck the young Sapgir. The subject matter was also unusual. The poet described the everyday life in the barracks on the outskirts of Moscow – poverty, ugliness, and squalor. These social realities had previously remained largely outside the purview of Russian poetry and had certainly never been presented in such a detached fashion. The following poem is characteristic:

У забора проститутка,
 Девка белобрысая.
 В доме 9 – ели утку
 И капусту кислую.

Засыпала на постели
 Пара новобрачная
 В 112 артели
 Жизнь была невзрачная.

Шел трамвай, киоск косился,
 Болт торчал подвешенный.
 Самолет, гудя, носился
 В небе, словно бешеный.²⁶⁹

(There was a prostitute by the fence,
 Tow-headed wench.
 In house 9 duck was being eaten
 With sauerkraut.

A newlywed couple in bed
 Was falling asleep.
 In Brigade 112
 Life was nothing to write home about.

A streetcar was passing by, a kiosk was awry,
 A suspended bolt loomed large.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁶⁹ *Mansarda*, ed. by L. Kropivnitskii, Moscow: Kontrakt-TMT, 1992, 110.

A droning plane crisscrossed the sky
As if it were mad.)

These verses and others like it made Kropivnitskii to be regarded as the founder of the so-called “Barrack School,” and he was introduced as such in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*.²⁷⁰ In this anthology, Kropivnitskii’s poetry is accompanied by the poems of his disciples, Sapgir and Kholin, who since the early 1960s had been known in Moscow as “Barrack poets.” They were introduced to Western readers under this name in the American anthology *Poets on Street Corners* (1968), where, together with Iosif Brodsky, they represented unofficial Soviet poetry.²⁷¹

Igor Kholin (1920-1999) began writing poetry when he was already over thirty.²⁷² *Zhiteli baraka* was the title of his first book, which was created at the end of the 1950s, but published (and then only partially) three decades later.²⁷³ In the poet’s interpretation, the Barrack becomes a symbol of everyday Soviet life, with its drinking, lechery, and violence:

На днях у Сокола
Дочь
Мать уюкала
Причина скандала
Дележ вещей
Теперь это стало
В порядке вещей²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 269. Kropivnitskii’s poems were also published in *Apollon-77*, in the journals *Tretia volna* and *Strelets*, and later in the miscellany *Mansarda* (1992) and in *Samizdat veka* (1997). See also Kropivnitskii’s two verse collections: *Pechal’no ulybnutsia* (1977) and *Zemnoi uiut* (1992).

²⁷¹ *Poets on Street Corners: Portraits of Fifteen Russian Poets*, by Olga Carlisle. New York: Random House, 1968.

²⁷² Kholin had a rather unusual life, full of weird twists. In a humorous poem dedicated to him Kropivnitskii wrote: “.Лукавый, тощий, кем и где / Ты только не был, Игорь Холин! / Судьбой лоскутной ты доволен. / Теперь ты знаешь – что и где. / Был капитаном МВД. / Служил лакеем в Метрополе. / И стал поэтом. Кем и где / Ты только не был, Игорь Холин!” (Cunning and skinny, what haven’t you done, / Where haven’t you been, Igor Kholin! / You are satisfied with your chaotic life, / You now know what it’s all about. / You were captain of the police, / Worked as a waiter at the “Metropol,” / Then became a poet. What haven’t you done, / Where haven’t you been, Igor Kholin!; Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 116).

²⁷³ See Kholin’s collection *Zhiteli baraka*, Moscow: Prometei, 1989. It was followed by *Stikhi s posviashcheniami*, Paris: Kolobok, 1989; *Voinrid*, Moscow: Raritet, 1993; *Lirika bez liriki*, Moscow: Tretia volna, 1996; *Izbrannoe*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999.

²⁷⁴ *Izbrannoe*, 197.

(One of these days near the Sokol subway station
 A daughter
 Did in her mother
 The reason for the scandal
 Was an argument over some household items
 Lately this has become
 A common occurrence)

Before Kholin, the Barrack, paraphrasing Maiakovskii's well-known lines, twisted and writhed, "tongueless," since it had "nothing to shout or speak with" ("Oblako v shtanakh," 1915). Finally, the poet gives the Barrack a tongue, and it begins "to shout or speak":

Дан твою рап
 Рап твою дап
 Доп твою дить
 Роп твою тить
 Дить твою рить
 Рать твою дать
 Ведь твою теть
 Теть твою меть²⁷⁵

Using these nonsensical words, Kholin reproduces the intonation pattern of the most frequently used vulgarities, variations of which populate the speech of the Barrack's residents. As is readily apparent, the poet learned not only from Kropivnitskii, but also directly from the Futurists, namely Kruchenykh. *Zaum'* becomes a potent tool of social satire, which Kholin uses extensively in his other poems.²⁷⁶

Sometimes, however, *zaum'* has a more lyrical function in Kholin's poetry, underscoring the poignancy of intimate confessions. Here the poet laments his fate, a life spent in the Barrack:

Я итал на Ипару
 Чачара
 Чачара
 А вы говорите
 Что не было светлых минут²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ *Izbrannoe*, 322.

²⁷⁶ See «Данка рандит / Ганка растрат / Данка побрит / Ганка усат / Сад их рассудит / Суд их рассадит / Как Дрободана Евбенча / И Евбодана Довбенча» (*Ibid.*, 321).

²⁷⁷ *Mansarda*, 235.

(I lied to Ipara
Chachara
Chachara
And you still insist
That there were no bright moments)

Although Kholin was known mostly for his “Barrack” poetry, he was not a poet of a single theme and a few ingenious devices. His style continued to develop as he explored a variety of topics in his poetic cycles, “Kosmicheskie stikhi,” “Voinrid,” “Reka voiny,” “Kholin,” and others.²⁷⁸ In the late 1960s the poet wrote the narrative poems “Pole,” “Pesnia bez slov,” “Velikii prazdnik,” “Umer zemnoi shar,” in which his poetic voice became less caustic and more lyrical, although it still retained its profound irony. In the mid-1970s Kholin turned to prose²⁷⁹ but went back to writing poetry in the 1990s.

In comparison with Kholin, Genrikh Sapgir (1928-1999), another “Barrack poet,” was much less “barrack-oriented.” Even in his first book, *Golosa* (1958-1962),²⁸⁰ where the images of the Barrack’s tenants occupy a significant place, this topic still remains secondary. Absurdity in Sapgir’s poetry was ontological rather than social, and could even be amusing. In his early poem, “Razgovory na ulitse,” Sapgir offers a metaphor for this type of absurdity – a cacophony of voices heard in the street:

...Сделала аборт
В ресторане накачался
Не явился на концерт
У бухгалтера инфаркт

²⁷⁸ See Evgenii Kropivnitskii’s letter to Kholin of March 22, 1965: “I have read your new poems. Igor Sergeevich, and hasten to give you my opinion. They are remarkably novel, there has been nothing like this before. Your creativity crescendos: the reach of your poetry continually broadens into new areas. Having started as my apprentice, imitator, and follower, you suddenly went further, and, being an innovator, took a new and totally independent path, leaving behind hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of contemporary poets. You not only display courage, but make consistent efforts to overcome serious obstacles, and demonstrate a striving for new accomplishments. If formerly some of your poems (which were strong, anyway) bore a certain resemblance of Kruchenykh and Seva Nekrasov, then these latest poems are striking for their poetic originality and freshness.” (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 116).

²⁷⁹ Kholin wrote the absurdist fictions, “Koshki-myshki,” “S minusom edinitsa,” and “Pamiatnik pechke.”

²⁸⁰ Needless to say, all of Sapgir’s books initially appeared in samizdat. His first “real” book, *Sonety na ruhashkakh*, was published in Paris in 1976 and reprinted in Moscow in 1989. His other books include *Moskovskie mify*, Moscow: Prometei, 1989; *Stikhi-87*, Paris: Afonia, 1989; *Chernoviki Pushkina*, Moscow: Raritet, 1992; *Izbrannoe*, Moscow: Tretia volna, 1993; *Smeiantsy*, Moscow: PIK, 1995; *Stikhi dlia perstnia*, Moscow: Tretia volna, 1996; *Letiashchii i spiashchii*, Moscow: Novoie literaturnoe obozrenie, 1997; *Sobranie sochinenii v 4 tomakh*, Moscow: Tretia volna, 1999.

Присудили десять лет
Смотрят а уж он скончался
Я и сам люблю балет²⁸¹

(... She had an abortion
He got drunk in a restaurant
He did not show up at a concert
The accountant had a heart attack
He got ten years
While they were looking about he died
I like ballet myself)

Saggir's first book, *Golosa* demonstrated his thoughtful assimilation of the Futurist legacy, which had provided the basis for the development of his own poetic identity. The poetic techniques of Maiakovskii and Khlebnikov inspired him to pay special attention to consonance, which became the hallmark of his style. Similarly, the practices of the OBERIU determined his predilection for the grotesque and the fantastic, a technique he had already mastered in early poems, such as "Ikar," "Obezian," "Borona," and "Pauk."

Another productive source of inspiration for Saggir was the poetic experiments of the Futurists' close associate, Elena Guro, particularly her prose poems. Saggir employed this genre in his book *Elegii* (1967-1970), in which he touches upon Guro's favorite subjects: creativity, love, immortality, nature, and even the Finnish countryside. Although his treatment of these subjects was certainly different, being based on his own, unique experience, his appreciation for every moment of existence was very close to his predecessor's outlook. Here, for instance, is a fragment of Saggir's elegy "O smerti":

Сегодня выйдя из метро – троллейбус липы ресторан СОФИЯ – улицу я знаю наизусть – впервые ощутил – (продажа мужских носков – отмеченные солнцем лица – скучающая продавщица) – что это ЕСТЬ – и только ЭТО – реальность из которой хода нет – улица устало клонилась к западу – недоуменье оставило – поток машин вливался в солнце что стояло над шпилем Белорусского вокзала – сияла каждая пылинка – и было счастье! – к вечеру слышнее пахли липы – сознание что вижу и дышу – на самом деле – и что умру Я а никто другой²⁸²

(Exiting the subway station today – trolley bus linden trees the Sophia restaurant

²⁸¹ Genrikh Saggir. *Sobranie sochinenii v 4 tomakh*, Moscow: Tretia volna, 1999, t. 1, 42.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 230.

– I know this street by heart – felt it for the first time – (men’s socks on sale – faces marked by the sun – a bored shopgirl) – all this IS here – and only THIS – a reality whence there is no escape – the street tiredly slouched westward – my confusion disappeared – the stream of cars flowed into the sun above the spire of Belorusskii railroad station – every speck of dust shone – and there was happiness! – towards nightfall the fragrance of linden trees grew stronger – an awareness that I see and breathe – in reality that I and no one else will die)

Beginning with his collection *Molchanie* (1963), in which Sapgir joyfully declared, «Что хочу то чучу» (What I like I will strike),²⁸³ the poet consistently explored the potential of *zaum*’. His interest in Kruchenykh’s ideas became especially pronounced in the book *Psalm*y (1965-1966), where the poet employed *zaum*’ to depict “the incomprehensibility, the illogicality of life and its horror.”²⁸⁴ He did this in full accordance with Kruchenykh’s recommendations, adhering to them even more closely in his *Liustikhi* (1965-1966), a collection of love poems. In *Liustikhi* Sapgir drastically “loosened up grammar and syntax,”²⁸⁵ sometimes composing the poem using only isolated words, which are grammatically and logically unconnected with each other:

Смотрит
Пятном
Курю
Дрожит
Да-а-а²⁸⁶

(Is watching
Like a spot
I’m smoking
Is shivering
We-e-e-ll)

The piece seems to be an attempt to convey the feeling of unease and loneliness experienced by two lovers, and the reader can easily figure it out. Every poem in *Liustikhi* was numbered, hinting that the fragment in question is supposed to be read in the context of the surrounding texts, which treat the theme of a deteriorating relationship

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁸⁴ “New Ways of the Word,” in *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, 72.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

in a much more direct and explicit fashion. Still, the piece gives plenty of scope to the reader's own imagination, and this is probably the poet's ultimate intention.²⁸⁷

Saggir continued his experiments with *zaum* ' in his later works, frequently with spectacular results. This is true, for example, of his cycle "Deti v sadu" (1988), in which the poet recreates the fragmentation, vagueness, and unease of his childhood impressions with the help of truncated and distorted words:

там солдатск полос крова
лампочка без абажу
на столе стака и нож...
здесь мельпещут всевозмож
льки и бабочки и жу
розы в сумерках крова
.....
где бы ни был – zde и ve
мне сквози двойная те
кровь и рвота на газе
мяч потерянный в траве ²⁸⁸

(there is a soldier's stripe-be
a light bulb with no lampsha
a gla and a knife on the table
here flucker all sorts of
oths and butterflies and bu
agonflies in the twilight of the be

²⁸⁷ Although Saggir's experiments with *zaum* ' were enthusiastically supported by most of the Lianozovo poets, their mentor, Evgenii Kropivnitskii, a proponent of "concrete realism," remained rather skeptical. See, for example, his letter to Kholin of December 22, 1965, where he concentrated on Saggir's above-cited poem, mockingly calling his book *Liustikhi* (which may be translated as "lovpoems") *Liushi* (which may be translated as "lovciphers"): "<...> The poems in this book, which I call 'LiuShi' (i.e. 'Liubovnye Shifry') I don't understand at all, while everybody else, especially the girls, who were giggling, seemed to get it. They kept giggling, but when I asked them to decipher these poems, they said, 'Everything is clear enough.' Finally one of them took pity on me and deciphered one of the poems. 'Is watching / Like a spot / I'm smoking / Is shivering // We-e-ell...' The explanation is as follows: 'A man is sitting with a girl and smoking. The girl is difficult to see, like a spot. She is shivering. 'We-e-ell...' This 'We-e-ell...' means that the man is in a quandary because of the girl's nervousness. You see, it's very simple.' <...> However, I don't want to write like this myself, although it is very easy and very fashionable right now <...>" (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 116). See also Kropivnitskii's comments on the poems in Saggir's book *Molchanie*, where the poet employed *zaum* ' for the first time: "<...> Saggir was a romantic, and he had his own identity. Besides, he was good at versifying and was able to find the right words. Later he turned from poetry to prose, which he divided into short lines; he probably thought that this would transform it into poetry. The content of his poetry was quite attractive, but he replaced it with dots ('Svidanie'), all kinds of meaningless words ('ksi-ksa,' etc), and generally became immersed in *zaum* '. And what was the result of all this? The result was that from being a sincere poet, Saggir turned into an insincere one; and all this self-entanglement is not interesting at all <...>" (Letter to Kholin of January 18, 1968; *Ibid.*)

²⁸⁸ *Sobranie sochinenii v 4 tomakh*, t. 2, 201-202.

.....
 wherever I am – he and everywhe
 double moti transpir for me
 blood and sick on a newspap
 a ball lost in the grass)

Kruchenykh was important for Sapgir not only as the inventor of *zaum'*, but also as a parodist with a distinctive style. Indeed, Sapgir's poetic cycle "Etiudy v manere Ogareva i Polonskogo" (1987) is directly related to Kruchenykh's book *Starinnaia liubov'* (1912), a witty parody on nineteenth-century romantic poetry. Both collections have love as their subject; in addition, the name Ogarev in Sapgir's work is a clear allusion to Herzen, who is mentioned in Kruchenykh's book (two poems in *Starinnaia liubov'* are entitled "Pis'ma Natashi k Gertsenu").²⁸⁹ This intertextual dialogue, which until now has not been noticed by scholars, demonstrates the artfully concealed parodic nature of Sapgir's "Etiudy..." His other large poetic cycle, *Chernoviki Pushkina* (1985, 1995), is also a parody, but a somewhat bolder one than "Etiudy..." In this work Sapgir adds missing lines to Pushkin's unfinished poems, carefully mimicking (in most cases) the poetic style of the period. Although these parodies fit perfectly into a specific Futurist tradition, which includes Kruchenykh's innumerable attacks on Pushkin, as well as Kharms' "Anecdoty iz zhizni Pushkina," Sapgir managed to find his own path, and by doing so substantiated his reputation as a tireless innovator.

The element of parody is very prominent in the verse of another member of the Lianozovo group, Vsevolod Nekrasov (b. 1934), although the targets of his parody are rather different. In most of his poems Nekrasov mocks various ideological stereotypes, such as the myth of the Soviet people's well-being and happiness in contrast to the misfortune of the inhabitants of the "rotten bourgeois" West:

Охохо
 у нас-то хорошо
 у них плохо
 что у них плохо
 то у нас хорошо
 почему уж так

²⁸⁹ The poet Nikolai Ogarev (1812-1877) was Aleksandr Herzen's (1812-1870) longtime friend and collaborator.

потому что
у нас
Родина
а у них что ²⁹⁰

(O-ho-ho
how nice it is around here
it is bad over there
what is bad over there
is good around here
why is it so
because
we have
the Motherland
and what do they have)

This method of playful subversion, which proved to be extremely effective against all kinds of utopianism, can already be found in Nekrasov's verses of the late 1950s. This makes the poet the actual founder of a new trend in poetry, which would later be designated "Moscow Conceptualism," and which would come to full fruition in the works of Dmitrii Prigov and Lev Rubinstein.

Nekrasov himself, however, remains rather suspicious of the term "Conceptualism," especially when it is applied to his own texts. He prefers the term "Concretism," which has been used in discussions of his writings as well as those of other Lianozovo poets. Here are Nekrasov's reflections on this matter:

We did not call ourselves "Concretists" – others did. But when the term was introduced, we did not argue. And we don't argue now: we like the term. It accurately defined us. The word itself was already in use – in Germany and other countries the Concrete poetry had existed for a long time. <...> Our translator Liesl Ujvary²⁹¹ correctly identified the feature we shared: like the Germans, we did not need any poetic element other than bare facts, reality, or, if you will, concreteness...²⁹²

The tendency to be "Concrete" was dictated by the resolute exclusion of any

²⁹⁰ Vsevolod Nekrasov. *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, Moscow: Prometei, 1989, 32.

²⁹¹ See *Die Pestsäule*, Wien: R. Federmann, 1973, 495-522.

²⁹² "Vyrazhais po-tepereshnemu, khotelos' liricheskogo konkretisma" in *Tochka zreniia. Vizual'naiia poezia: 90-e gody*, ed. by Dmitrii Bulatov, Kaliningrad / Koenigsberg: Simplitcii, 1998, 71.

poetic rhetoric that had been compromised by its previous appearance in the “official” literature of both the Soviet and pre-Soviet eras. In one of his poems Nekrasov states his aesthetic position, playing with the interjection “O!” – a traditional expression of poetic exaltation:

О это О	(O is O
О	О
О	О
О	О
О	О
Это пОэт	This is a pOet
Это понятно	This is clear
А это и вовсе О	It's just O
О	О
эта пОэзия	this pOetry
ревОлюции	of the revOlution
Ах что же это	Ah! What is it
за пОэма экстОза	what is this pOem of ecstOsy
И О Россия	And O Russia
Если так говорить	If one is going to speak this way
О Росиии	Of ROssia
и о пОэзии	and of pOetry
и.о. поэзии	brevet poetry
известный союз	the well-known union
поэтизм	of poesy with despotism
С деспотизмом-с	Yes, sir, with despotism
Этого вот я и боюсь – если вы не боитесь ²⁹³	This is what I am afraid of – if you are not)

As one can see, the exclusion of high-flown rhetoric resulted in the dramatic contraction of the poetic discourse, which in Nekrasov’s verse becomes limited to fragmented sentences and isolated words. In these poems Nekrasov skillfully activates the paronomastic and visual qualities of the text:

²⁹³ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 33. In addition to formulating his general poetic principles, Nekrasov is clearly taking aim at the “official” avant-garde poet Voznesenskii, who authored the narrative poem “Oza” (1964) and an essay entitled “O” (1983).

Живой
и ой
ой
и слава Богу

не сочти только
за Бога
ничего другого

Ге Бе за Бога
Бога за Ге Бе ²⁹⁴

(Alive
and oops

oops
and God bless

just don't mistake
for God
anything else

[K]GB for God
God for [K]GB)

Like Kholin's and Saggir's poems, Nekrasov's texts were widely circulated in samizdat form. They appeared in the samizdat journals *Sintaksis* and *37*, as well as in various émigré anthologies, almanacs, and periodicals. After 1964 Nekrasov's poems were occasionally published in Czech and in German, and his line "Svoboda est' svoboda" provided the title for the German bilingual anthology of unofficial Soviet poetry, *Freiheit ist Freiheit* (1975). Nekrasov's first poetic collection, *100 stikhotvorenii*, was published in the United States in 1987, and two years later his works finally reached a domestic audience.²⁹⁵

Although the position of unofficial poetry drastically changed in the last decade, Nekrasov continues to be the least known major Russian avant-garde poet. Yet his impact on modern poetry is probably the most tangible, as Gennadii Aigi, another prominent

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁹⁵ In Russia his first book, *Stikhi iz zhurnala* (1989), was followed by *Spravka* (1991), *Paket* (1996), and *Doiche Bukh* (1998).

figure in the movement, noted:

In my opinion, to my mind, if anyone did anything important for Russian poetry – in that area, at that stage of development when poetry grows like a tree, when poetry develops naturally, when the language itself develops, – it was Vsevolod Nekrasov <...> I think he is the most important poet of the post-war period. I believe that the importance of his contribution is becoming more and more evident.²⁹⁶

Gennadii Aigi (b. 1934), whom Roman Jakobson called “an extraordinary poet of the modern Russian avant-garde,”²⁹⁷ developed at the intersection of two languages and two cultures – Chuvash and Russian. He was born in the Chuvash village of Shamurzino; his father was a teacher of Russian in the local school and a translator of Pushkin into Chuvash.²⁹⁸ In 1953, Aigi was admitted to the Literary Institute and moved to Moscow. At that time he still wrote poetry in Chuvash,²⁹⁹ but in 1960, on the advice of Pasternak, to whom he had become close, he switched to Russian, and at the same time turned exclusively to free verse.

He was able to publish only a few pieces in Russian,³⁰⁰ even though his poetry did not contain any openly anti-Soviet sentiments or statements. With a handful of exceptions, he did not touch upon the topics of the day in his verse.³⁰¹ Aigi focused on traditional subjects, such as silence, memory, dreams, and of course, nature as manifested in images taken from Chuvash folklore: forests, fields, and ravines.³⁰² The reason for his

²⁹⁶ “Poet – eto nesostoiavshiisia sviatoi,” *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5/6 (1998): 17.

²⁹⁷ Roman Jakobson’s letter on Malevich published in 1975 in a French periodical. Cited in Sergei Biriukov “Gennadii Aigi pered litsom russkogo avangarda,” *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5/6 (1998): 53.

²⁹⁸ The family name of Gennadii Aigi is Lisin. “Aigi” is his pen name, which in Chuvash means “that one himself,” a nickname of one of the poet’s ancestors. This pen name can also be read as an allusion to the phrase “That Solitary Individual,” chosen by Kierkegaard, Aigi’s favorite philosopher, as the title of his major work published posthumously (“Den Enkelte”).

²⁹⁹ Aigi began publishing in Chuvash in 1949. His first book of poetry *Imenem otsov*, appeared in press in 1958, and over time, was followed by seven more books in Chuvash.

³⁰⁰ *Literaturnaia gazeta*, September 26, 1961. In the same year, a few of Aigi’s Chuvash poems appeared in translations by Bella Akhmadulina and David Samoilov.

³⁰¹ Among these exceptions were the poem “Rozy na Vatslavskoi ploshchadi” (1969) dedicated to Jan Palach, the student who immolated himself in protest against the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as several poems dedicated to Aigi’s friend, Konstantin Bogatyrev (1925-1976), the poet and literary translator who was murdered under suspicious circumstances, most likely by KGB agents.

³⁰² As Peter France notes, Aigi’s poetry “owes to Chuvash culture a set of values,” namely “a veneration for old people, including the weak and helpless; a sense of family and community; a bond between humanity

complete rejection by the literary establishment was the experimental nature of his poetic technique, which made him a visible figure among the unofficial avant-garde poets. In the literary underground Aigi befriended the Lianozovo poets, although he became a member of another, much more obscure unofficial group organized by Aleksandr Vasiliev, the son of a famous Soviet film director.³⁰³ This group was united chiefly by their admiration for Khlebnikov's poetry, which – as Aigi himself acknowledged – was the most important source of his poetic development.³⁰⁴ Among his other literary teachers, Aigi lists the early Maiakovskii, the idol of his youth,³⁰⁵ and Kazimir Malevich, whose theoretical works he began studying in 1961.³⁰⁶ Aigi would later note:

I am indebted to the Russian avant-garde, primarily Khlebnikov, Malevich, and Maiakovskii, and in my Russian poetry I strive to push the Russian language to its extreme.³⁰⁷

Like his predecessors, Aigi was not satisfied with the existing vocabulary and enthusiastically invented new words, such as “chtotost’,” “esmost’,” “usnulost’,” and

and the natural world.” (“Introduction” in Gennady Aigi, *Selected Poems*, 1954-94, bilingual edition, ed. and trans. by Peter France, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997, 21). He also notes that the rhythm of Aigi's poems often resembles the incantation of the Chuvash pagan religion (*Ibid.*, 23).

³⁰³ Aleksandr Georgievich Vasiliev (1939-1993) was a student at the Moscow Institute of Cinematography, from which he was suspended for publishing an article, “Sex and Cinematography,” in a samizdat journal; thanks to his family connections he was reinstated some time later. Aleksandr Vasiliev was a patron of the arts, a host of an artistic salon, a distributor of samizdat publications, and an underground entrepreneur (See Polikovskaia, “*My predchuvstvie, predtecha... "Ploshchad' Maiakovskogo 1958-1965*,” 369). Another member of the Vasiliev group was the artist Vladimir Iakovlev, who later became rather well-known. He worked in a primitivist manner, creating almost childlike images of various objects, primarily flowers. In certain ways his aesthetics were very close to Aigi's. For Iakovlev see Vladimir Iakovlev, *Zhivopis', grafika*. Katalog vystavki. M., Gosudarstvennaia Tretiakovskaia Galereia, 1995; Iliia Kabakov, *60-70-e... Zapiski o neofitsialnoi zhizni v Moskve*, Wien: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, 1999, 68-69, 159.

³⁰⁴ See Gennadii Aigi – Sergei Biriukov, “Realizm avangarda,” *Voprosy literatury*, no. 6 (1991): 5.

³⁰⁵ Maiakovskii's direct influence is rather evident in Aigi's early poems. Here is one example, “Zaviaz' ” (1954): «Пускай я буду среди вас / как пыльная монета оказавшаяся / среди шуршащих ассигнаций / в шелковом скользком кармане: / звенеть бы ей во весь голос / да не с чем сталкиваться чтобы звенеть». (Let me be in your midst / a dusty coin turning up / among rustling banknotes / in a slippery silk purse: / it would ring at the top of its voice / but there's nothing hard to ring on; Gennadii Aigi, *Selected Poems*, 30-31).

³⁰⁶ After 1961, Aigi worked at the Maiakovskii Museum in Moscow, where he managed to organize exhibitions of leading artists of the early Russian avant-garde, Malevich, Filonov, Tatlin, Matiushin, Guro, Larionov and Goncharova, Chagall, whose works had previously been excluded from any official displays.

³⁰⁷ “Realizm avangarda.” 6. According to Peter France, Malevich's direct influence is particularly visible in the attention Aigi pays to the spatial organization of words on the page and their positioning in relation to the surrounding margins. (“Introduction” in Gennady Aigi, *Selected Poems*, 23). At the same time, Aigi admitted that what he did not accept in the Russian avant-garde was “its social utopianism and religious eclecticism.” (“Realizm avangarda,” 6).

others. For the same reason – that is, in order to express himself with the utmost precision – Aigi occasionally turned to *zaum*’, rather decipherable in his case, however. Following the Futurists’ example, the poet endowed single isolated sounds with their own semantic and emotional meaning.³⁰⁸ Thus the sound “a” in Aigi’s poetry is “a luminous point of light,” as one scholar aptly put it.³⁰⁹ This “luminous point of light” can be found, for example, in the poem “Utro v detstve” (1961):

а, колебало, а,
впервые просто чисто
и озаряло без себя

узко, одиноко
и выявлялось: полевая!
проста, русалочка!..

(a, it rocked, a,
for the first time simple pure
and was lighting apart from itself
narrowly, alone

and she was there: from the fields!
simple, a little mermaid!)³¹⁰

Aigi’s constant experiments with punctuation can also be seen as a development of the Futurists’ practices. In the majority of his poems he did not dispense with punctuation entirely (as some of the Futurists had), but rather replaced the traditional system with one of his own, in which capital letters, brackets, colons, and dashes were employed in a highly original manner.³¹¹ In Aigi’s poetry punctuation is not a tribute to custom and norm, but a means by which to establish new relations among words, objects and events. Here is the poem “I: Mesto riabine” (1977):

³⁰⁸ See Khlebnikov’s works “Khudozhniki mira” (1919) and “Nasha osnova” (1919). Kruchenykh also shared this tendency. In one of his letters to Shemshurin he writes: “What does the letter ‘U’ mean? In my view, it is flight, it is depth. Other vowels are quieter, ‘U’ is movement, anxiety... What the letters ‘Ts’, ‘F’ and others mean in terms of emotions etc.” (Quoted in E. Bobrinskaia, “Teoria momentalnogo tvorchestva A. Kruchenykh.” *Terentievskii sbornik*, ed. S. Kudriavtsev, Moscow: Gilea, 1998, 33). Aigi described the influence of Kruchenykh on him as that of “a brilliant critic, an outstanding linguist” (“Realizm avangarda,” 4).

³⁰⁹ Atner Khuzangai, “Posviashchaetsia A.,” *Lik Chuvashii*, no.4 (1994): 39.

³¹⁰ *Selected Poems*, 46-47.

³¹¹ On Aigi’s punctuation see Gerald Janeczek, “The Poetics of Punctuation in Gennadii Aigi’s verse,” *Slavic and East European Journal*, 40, no. 2 (1996): 297-308.

Лес – весь в пятнах крови – храм опустошенный.
(Как без птиц: без душ. Без-словье и без-звучие.)

И – у входа: вся – подобием:
Параскева Пятница рябина

(The forest – all in splashes of blood – a ravaged temple.
(As if without birds: without souls. No-word no-sound.)

And – at the entrance: all is a likeness:
Parasceve-good-Friday-rowan)³¹²

Despite certain hermeticism, Aigi's poems turned out to be rather "translatable" into foreign languages, and this can explain his unusual popularity in the West as compared to the other unofficial avant-garde poets.³¹³ Beginning in 1962 his poems were translated into many European languages, published in periodicals, and later appeared in book form. In 1993 a monograph about Aigi appeared in France in the series "Poets Today."³¹⁴

The first collection of Aigi's poems in Russian, *Stikhi 1954-1971*, was published in Munich in 1975; it was followed by a complete collection of his poems, *Otmechennaia zima* (1982), which came out in Paris. In Russia the poet acquired access to a broad readership only in 1991, when his collection *Zdes'* was finally published.³¹⁵

Deprived of any opportunity to get their writings in print, unofficial avant-garde poets had to earn their living by doing some other (preferably literary) work, to which they devoted themselves with varying degrees of interest and enthusiasm. In addition to money, this kind of work gave them an official position in society, without which they were vulnerable to accusations of "parasitism," a fact clearly demonstrated by the trial of Iosif Brodsky in 1964.³¹⁶ Some poets supported themselves as journalists; Alexandr Kondratov, for example, was a prolific author of popular science books and articles.³¹⁷ Others, like Mikhail Eremin, worked for the theater and did literary translations. The

³¹² *Selected Poems*, 141.

³¹³ See Kuzminsky's introduction to Aigi's poems in *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 490-491.

³¹⁴ Léon Robel. *Aigi*, Paris: Seghers, 1993.

³¹⁵ This collection was followed by *Teper' vseгда snega* (1992) and *Tetrad' Veroniki* (1997).

³¹⁶ Brodsky was arrested in January 1964 and sentenced to five years of administrative exile. He was sent to work on a state farm in Arkhangelsk region. Although he was released in November 1965 and allowed to return to Leningrad, his arrest and imprisonment was certainly a very frightening precedent.

³¹⁷ See Losev, "Homo Ludens umer," *Zvezda*, no. 8 (1994): 147.

latter proved to be the main source of income for Gennadii Aigi, who translated not only Russian, but also French, Polish, and Hungarian poetry into the Chuvash language.³¹⁸ For many avant-garde authors, however, the most easy and natural way of “moonlighting” was by writing children’s poetry, as members of the OBERIU had done earlier. Genrikh Sapgir became a well-known children’s poet; Igor Kholin, Vsevolod Nekrasov, and Vladimir Ufliand also wrote and published poetry for children. Here is what Igor Kholin had to say about the situation:

...Perhaps it’s a miracle, but as a children’s poet I have always been officially acknowledged. In fact, I began writing poems for children in 1959, like Genrikh Sapgir. By and large, this is how I earned my living. I brought out books, published poems in periodicals – there were numerous publications...³¹⁹

Of course, there was nothing miraculous about any of this: these publications differed significantly from the avant-garde poets’ “adult” writings, which most of them never even attempted to publish.³²⁰ None of them was willing to satisfy the conditions, which would enable a poet of avant-garde orientation to gain officially sanctioned access to readers: experimentation must not be too radical; unquestionable loyalty to the Soviet regime must be articulated.

Only very seldom was a poet allowed to omit the latter requirement in favor of other, less ideologically charged, characteristics. Such was the case of the Leningrad poet Victor Sosnora (b. 1936), whose first collection of poetry, *Ianvarskii liven'*, appeared in 1962. A major factor in his ability to publish was his working-class background. While a part-time student at Leningrad State University, Sosnora was employed at a factory as a metalworker, and his proletarian status put him in good odor with the authorities, who

³¹⁸ In particular, Aigi translated Maiakovskii’s “Oblako v shtanakh” and Tvardovskii’s “Vasilii Terkin.” He also compiled the anthologies *Poety Frantsii* (1968), *Poety Vengrii* (1974), and *Poety Pol'shi* (1987).

³¹⁹ “My vseгда iskhodili iz real'nosti,” in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fakt*, 323. Of course, these publications, no matter how abundant, provided unofficial avant-garde authors with only a modest income, and certainly did not protect them from potential persecution on the part of the authorities.

³²⁰ If some of the avant-garde poets ever made such an attempt, it was only at the very beginning of their careers. Valentin Khromov, for example, recalls that in 1956 Boris Slutskii tried to help three young members of the Chertkov group (Khromov, Krasovitskii, and Sergeev) to publish their poems in the prestigious official almanac *Den' poezii*, but this project quickly failed (“My vseгда zanimalis' tol'ko iskusstvom,” in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fakt*, 359.) Later the underground authors sent their unconventional writings to official periodicals and publishing houses only in order to make mischief and not really hoping to see them in print. Thus Kholin once submitted a manuscript to the publishing house “Sovetskii pisatel'” only to have it rejected outright (see “My vseгда iskhodili iz real'nosti,” in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fakt*, 322).

were constantly on the look-out for genuine “proletarian” literature. Although Sosnora treated this “working class” theme (always in great demand in Soviet times) rather unconventionally, it served as an artistic counterbalance to his taste for inexact rhymes, sound play, and neologisms. Here, for example, is one of Sosnora’s early poems:

Мы овладеваем
 токами
 и молотками стучаем...
 Но разве мы только токари,
 токующие
 над втулками?
 Разве мы только слесари,
 над железом кощунствующие?
 По воскресеньям
 лесками
 мы рыб на прудах защучиваем...³²¹

(We master
 the currents
 and bang hammers...
 But we are not just turners
 uttering mating calls
 over bushings...
 We are not just
 metalworkers
 blaspheming over iron.
 On Sundays we use
 our fishing lines
 to catch pikes from the ponds...)

Sosnora’s poetry also demonstrated his intense interest in Russian history, and this, in turn, made a positive impression on the authorities, who perceived it as evidence of the poet’s patriotism. Such masterpieces of Old Russian literature as *Slovo o polku Igoreve* and *Povest’ vremennykh let* became for Sosnora powerful sources of inspiration, which helped him to write his best early poems. These poems were written in the tradition of the early Aseev, who considered Sosnora his direct disciple and gave him active support from the very beginning of his literary career. Aseev’s assistance greatly

³²¹ *Ianvarskii liven’*, Moscow-Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1962.

helped with the publication of *Ianvarskii liven'*, for which he wrote a preface.³²² Despite Aseev's efforts, however, this collection suffered extensive cuts by the censor, and many of Sosnora's poems, which were already circulating in samizdat form, did not make it into the book.³²³ A similar fate befell almost all of Sosnora's subsequent collections published before the end of the 1980s: *Aist* (1972), *Stikhotvoreniia* (1977), *Kristall* (1977), *Pesn' lunnaia* (1982), and *Vozvrashchenie k moriu* (1989). These collections gave a rather distorted idea of the poet's work, which was growing increasingly more complex and gradually led to "prevalence of metaphor over logic."³²⁴ Not surprisingly, Sosnora's most experimental and interesting works remained unpublished, as was noted by Konstantin Kuzminsky:

The oeuvre of Sosnora is much more profound and threatening than those relatively few verses that appeared in his five small collections with a combined volume of about 500 pages...³²⁵

Some of these "threatening" texts did appear in Sosnora's publications abroad, including his collection *Izbrannoe* (Ann Arbor, 1987), but the majority has come to the Russian reader only since the mid-1990s. In particular, Sosnora's poetic book *Sovy*, composed in 1963, and which the poet had described as "a discovery of himself," was published in full only in 1996.³²⁶ In the same year several of Sosnora's absurdist plays, written in the 1960s, appeared in print for the first time.³²⁷ The poet's most comprehensive collection,

³²² Sosnora's second book, *Triptikh*, (1965), was dedicated to the memory of Aseev, who died in 1963. His autobiography, *Dom dnei* (1997), contains extensive recollections of Aseev (95-102). Besides Aseev, Sosnora had especially warm relations with Kruchenykh and Lili Brik (*Dom dnei*, 102-104; 79-91), and was on good terms with the former Futurist Vasili Kamenskii. His poetry was highly appreciated by David Burliuk when the older poet visited Moscow and Lili Brik showed him Sosnora's books and manuscripts. According to Sosnora, Burliuk wrote to him the following: "You are a real Him! Steam along! I brought up the whole of Futurism, I brought up two geniuses, both starting with the letter V, and here is another one, who grew up without me, but he is one of us. He is not the third one, he is altogether different, the tallest one, but also starting with the letter V! Victory! Sail away, and I shake your hand! The flying proletarian – David Burliuk" (*Dom dnei*, 81-82).

³²³ These poems appeared only in Sosnora's third collection, *Vsadniki* (1969), due to the active support of Dmitrii Likhachev, who wrote the preface for the book.

³²⁴ Andrei Arieu, "Arfografia," *Soglasie*, no. 3 (1993): 3.

³²⁵ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, t. 1, 635.

³²⁶ *Zvezda*, no. 4 (1996): 8-15.

³²⁷ See *Remont moria*, Sankt-Peterburg: Biblioteka al'manakha Petropol', 1996.

So that cancerous tumors
 Fall of souls and bodies,
 So that communism humming like a seashell,
 Would draw closer...)

This kind of utopian pathos linked the young poet with Maiakovskii of the post-revolutionary period, who also inspired Voznesenskii's numerous verses about Lenin, such as "Sequoia Lenina" (1961), "Ia v Shushenskom" (1962), and especially the narrative poem "Lonzhumo" (1963). These poems helped the young poet to carve out a niche in the Soviet establishment, and find official acceptance as Maiakovskii's direct descendant.³³⁰

Voznesenskii's position secured for him important privileges not granted to other Soviet authors. In particular, he was not only allowed to employ extravagant images but even to experiment with a mixture of verse and prose, occasionally spiced with elements of the absurd. This made his poems look strikingly colorful against the dull background of officially recognized poetry, and Voznesenskii won immediate and enduring fame, which soon extended beyond the borders of the Soviet Union and brought the young poet international recognition. His poems were enthusiastically translated and published abroad, and leading European and American scholars showed interest in Voznesenskii's work. Unlike their Soviet colleagues, who, because of censorship restrictions, were unable freely to discuss the poet's unconventional aesthetics (which were still supposed to be either harshly criticized or downplayed), Western Slavists could give proper attention to the essential features of Voznesenskii's verse. For example, Nils Åke Nilsson's article, "Parabola of Poetry," offered a very perceptive analysis of Voznesenskii's early works.³³¹ Whilst conceding that the poet "hardly <...> surprises us with new and original thoughts, with moments of meditation and insight...", Nilsson nevertheless praised him for his "distinctive will <...> to find new solutions to the

³³⁰ Voznesenskii's attitudes were apparently similar to those of the sculptor Ernst Neizvestnyi, as described by Iliia Kabakov: "This was a sort of belated utopianism, characteristic of the early 1960s. It was based on the belief that people will 'listen, think it over, and understand,' the belief that people needed, so to speak, righteous, honest, useful voices, to make them change their minds..." (Iliia Kabakov, *60-70-e... Zapiski o neofitsialnoi zhizni v Moskve*, 170).

³³¹ *Scando-Slavika*, 10 (1964): 49-64.

problems of form.”³³² In this respect he welcomed Voznesenskii’s orientation towards the Futurist tradition, which until then had not been exploited to its fullest extent. The scholar, however, was not terribly optimistic about the poet’s chances of continuing along this experimental path, and there was good reason for his concerns.

Although Voznesenskii was allowed to retain a certain boldness of form, he had to eschew more radical kinds of experimentation, returning to it – rather precipitately – only in the late 1980s, when it had become politically safe to do so. Voznesenskii’s collection *Aksioma samoiska* (1990) boasts an abundant assortment of the most flamboyant Futurist devices, which the poet employs in a manner that can only be described as frantic. He obviously hoped to profit from the fact that the Futurist legacy had been banned in Soviet Russia for decades and readers were still largely unaware of the avant-garde writers of the beginning of the century. At this time the average reader was even less aware of contemporary avant-garde poets, who had remained in the literary underground for thirty years, and who had only recently begun to be published in their own country.

This process, certainly, did not proceed smoothly: the unofficial avant-garde poets were virtual unknowns among publishers or potential sponsors, and their verse production had little commercial appeal. Not surprisingly, their first collections, such as Nekrasov’s *Stikhi iz zhurnala* (1989) and Sapgir’s *Moskovskie mify* (1989), were published at the authors’ own expense and in very small editions: 3,000 and 5,000 copies, respectively. The same thing was true of Gennadii Aigi. Although his first collection *Zdes’* (1991) was published by the state publishing house “Sovremennik,” the number of printed copies was only 7,500. Victor Sosnora had great difficulty finding publishers for his verse and prose,³³³ while Voznesenskii continued to reign over the market (his *Aksioma samoiska* was printed in 300,000 copies!), effectively posing as the major avant-garde author of the Thaw generation.

Although this situation has changed significantly in the last ten years, and many of the underground poets have finally and deservedly begun to attract the attention of readers, the dramatic history of the second wave of the Russian avant-garde remains

³³² *Ibid.*, 59.

³³³ About this see I. Foniakov, “Kak strogaiut volny,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 10, 1996.

distorted and murky. In order to make it clearer, we will closely investigate the literary careers of the most prominent representatives of official and unofficial avant-garde poetry, Andrei Voznesenskii and Vsevolod Nekrasov, and their impact on the development of experimental poetry in Russia.

ANDREI VOZNESENSKII

Andrei Voznesenskii was born in Moscow on May 12, 1933 into a family with a solid intellectual background. His childhood, the poet remembered, “was spent among Musaget editions of poetry and Hutte’s reference books.”³³⁴ The Musaget editions of Russian Symbolists reflected the interests of Voznesenskii’s mother, who conveyed her ardent love for poetry to her son. Hutte’s reference books on engineering, on the other hand, belonged to the poet’s father, a specialist in hydraulics. His passion, however, was art: he collected monographs on painters, and it was he who introduced Voznesenskii to Russian and foreign artists and would later encourage him to study painting professionally.

At the same time, the poet’s childhood, like the childhood of the majority of his peers, was far from being idyllic. Although he was not directly affected by Stalin’s purges, and neither of his parents were arrested and perished in Gulag, his early years coincided with the war with Germany. At the age of eight, Voznesenskii, together with his mother, was evacuated to Kurgan, a town beyond the Ural mountains. This time was filled with constant worries about Voznesenskii’s father, who had remained behind to work in Leningrad and from whom the family did not hear for a long time.

It was while in Kurgan that Voznesenskii wrote his first poem, continuing writing after his return to Moscow. By the age of 14, he had assembled a complete notebook of poetry, which he then dared to send to his poetic idol, Boris Pasternak, although with little hope of a response. To Voznesenskii’s surprise, Pasternak telephoned him and invited him to visit. Later, when he recalled that first encounter, Voznesenskii would write: “From that moment on my life was determined, it acquired its magic sense and dedication: his [Pasternak’s] new poems, telephone conversations, Sunday daytime visits,

³³⁴ “Ampir – iamb Moskvyy” in Andrei Voznesenskii. *Na virtual'nom vetru*, Moscow: Vagrius, 1998, 315.

walks – years of happiness and childish admiration.”³³⁵

While the young Voznesenskii continued to write poetry under Pasternak’s supervision (“Did he train my voice? He just told me what he liked and why” – the poet would explain later³³⁶), he simultaneously studied painting in order to enter the Moscow Architectural Institute. Pasternak approved of this decision: he did not see much opportunity for his disciple’s poetic career under the Stalinist regime.

The situation changed while Voznesenskii was already in the Institute. The dictator’s death and the ensuing “Thaw” resulted in immediate ideological relief: students were no longer persecuted for their imitation of Matisse and Picasso, and they were able to deviate from canonical requirements in their term projects. However, the closer Voznesenskii came to graduation, the more clearly he realized his poetic calling. An accident described in his poem “Pozhar v Arkhitektornom Institute” (1957), when all the term papers of his class literally went up in flames, turned out to be providential. “For me, it was more than a fire. I believe in symbols. I realized that the architecture was burned out in *me*. I became a poet.”³³⁷

A similar dilemma, as is well known, confronted the young Pasternak, who gave up his musical studies in favor of poetry. Music, however, determined many of Pasternak’s poetic images and themes, as well as other characteristic features of his verse. Similarly, Voznesenskii’s extensive training as a painter and architect should not be considered a waste of his time. This experience helped him find his own identity in poetry, in no small part because it allowed him to overcome his dependence on Pasternak. It was this sense of dependency that prevented Voznesenskii from publishing his early poems, which he thought profoundly “Pasternakovian.”³³⁸ Only after 1956 did he begin to write poems which he considered his “own.” This meant that not only were his themes and images inspired by painting and architecture, as in “Goya” (1957), “Parabolicheskaia ballada” (1958), narrative poem “Mastera” (1957), and some others, but – most of all – that his perception of the reality was that of a painter. Voznesenskii saw the world as an

³³⁵ “I kholodno bylo mladentsu v vertepe...” in *Ibid.*, 13.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

³³⁷ Cited in Andrei Voznesensky. *Antiworlds and The Fifth Ace*, ed. by Patricia Blake and Max Hayward, Garden City: Doubleday, 1967, viii.

³³⁸ “I kholodno bylo mladentsu v vertepe...” 42.

interaction of colors and shapes, as his poem “Iuzhnye bazary” (1958) testifies:

Долой Рафаэля!
 Да здравствует Рубенс!
 Фонтаны форели,
 Цветастая грубость!

 Индиго индеек.
 Вино и хурма.
 Ты нынче без денег?
 Пей задарма!

 Базары – пожары.
 Здесь огненно, молодо
 Пылают загаром
 Не руки, а золото.
 В них отблески масел
 И вин золотых.
 Да здравствует мастер,
 Что выпишет их!

(Down with all Raphaels
 And up with Flemish Rubens,
 His fountains of fishtails,
 His color and crudeness!

 Indigo of turkeys' wattles,
 Yellow hurmas, wine in bottles.
 You are out of money?
 Have a drink on me!

 Marketplaces, blazes
 Of fire and youthfulness!
 Your flaming bronzes
 Of hands are alight
 With the gleam of butter
 And the gold of wine.
 Three cheers for the painter
 Who brings you alive!)³³⁹

The striking pictorial quality of Voznesenskii's early verses clearly distinguished him from his first mentor, at the same time linking him to other writers who came to poetry

³³⁹ *Parabola*, Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1960, 33. Trans. by Max Hayward, in *Antiworlds and the Fifth Ace*, 139.

from painting, such as the young Maiakovskii and his fellow Futurists, and who had also employed techniques taken from painting in their verses.³⁴⁰ In addition, Voznesenskii shared with the latter an admiration for the modern painters, – first and foremost, Picasso, – as well as a related perception of art as a perpetual revolt against established norms, loudly proclaimed in the Futurists' numerous manifestoes.

In his narrative poem "Mastera," Voznesenskii speaks of that very same kind of creative behavior:

Художник первородный –
всегда трибун.
В нем дух переворота
и вечно – бунт.

(For an artist true-born
revolt is second nature:
he is both tribune
and troublemaker.)³⁴¹

In the tradition of his predecessors, Voznesenskii tried to emphasize not so much his civic valor (his enmity towards Stalin did not shake his beliefs in communism and Lenin³⁴²), but his artistic defiance. From the very beginning, he startled the reader with his provocative images, so reminiscent of the buoyancy of the Futurist poets, who had once shocked the public with their bold metaphors. Here are the lines from "Pozhar v Architecturnom Institute":

По сонному фасаду
бесстыже, озорно,
гориллой
краснозодою
взвивается окно!

(High on the sleepy facade
shamelessly, mischievously

³⁴⁰ See on this matter Khardzhiev, "Poeziia i zhivopis' (rannii Maiakovskii)" in Khardzhiev, *Stat'i ob avangarde*, t.1, 18-98. See also Juliette R. Stepanian, *Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision*, Houston: Rice University Press, 1986.

³⁴¹ *Mozaika*, Vladimir: Vladimirovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1960, 60. Trans. by Max Hayward, in *Antiworlds and the Fifth Ace*, 125.

³⁴² See his poems "S'ezd golosuet" (*Iunost'*, no. 4, 1958); "Lenin," "Na otkrytie Kuibyshevskoi GES..." (*Novyi mir*, no. 11, 1958); "Komsomol golosuet" (*Prizyv*, November 15, 1959), and others.

“But this ‘how to say it’ the poet was able to carry out very well.”³⁵⁰

The judgment of conservative critics, quite predictably, was much less favorable. They unanimously accused the poet of “formalism” and aesthetic, if not political, immaturity.³⁵¹ At this point, however, such accusations did not cause the young author any significant harm, and Voznesenskii’s career continued to develop at full speed. The young poet still published extensively in the most prestigious literary periodicals and his poetry readings (this tradition was revived after the years of suppression) were held in such famous auditoriums as the Polytechnic Museum, where Maiakovskii had regularly held his recitals. Voznesenskii quickly became a member of the Soviet Writers Union, and was even allowed, along with his poetic peer Evgenii Evtushenko, to take a trip to the United States. Although Stalin’s iron curtain had already been partially lifted, trips abroad were still considered an exclusive privilege, which had never been granted to writers without any official status.

This trip proved to be extremely important for Voznesenskii as a poet. His next collection *40 lyricheskikh otstuplenii iz poemy “Treugol’naia grusha”* (1962), commonly known as *Treugol’naia grusha*, was dedicated largely to the poet’s “discovery of America,” as he wrote in the preface. And indeed it was a “discovery,” since Voznesenskii’s depiction of the “rotten bourgeois West” turned out to be at significant variance with the established tradition. Unlike other Soviet poets who had treated this theme, Voznesenskii virtually avoided any political judgments, displaying instead a lively curiosity and broadmindedness. Although his foreign impressions were interspersed in the collection with domestic subjects, the purpose of such an arrangement was not an opposition of “them” and “us,” but quite the contrary. This structural device, as R.D.B. Thompson points out, “brings the contrasted worlds of Russia and the United States ... into a mirror-reflection.”³⁵²

However, in the poet’s own country this message was perceived as highly controversial. Some critics compared *Treugol’naia grusha* to “classical” works on the

³⁵⁰ “Kto ty?”, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 8, 1960.

³⁵¹ See B. Soloviev, “Legkii nesseser i tiazhelaia klad’,” *Oktiabr’*, no. 7 (1961): 187-189; V. Nazarenko, “Lzheneronchik,” *Zvezda*, no. 1 (1961): 220-221.

³⁵² “Andrei Voznesensky: Between Pasternak and Mayakovsky,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, 54 (1976): 52.

subject, chiefly Maiakovskii's "American" verses (1925-26), as well as his prose sketches "Moe otkrytie Ameriki" (1925-26). The comparison revealed, they asserted, nothing more than the young poet's ideological ignorance.³⁵³ On the other hand, the collection had influential supporters, such as Nikolai Aseev, Maiakovskii's closest collaborator. From his lofty vantage point, Aseev declared Voznesenskii to be Maiakovskii's true follower, insisting that the poets "shared their excitement for the achievements of the people and indignation with the capitalists, who owned these wonders of engineering."³⁵⁴

Obviously, the purpose of this statement, which was only partially true, was to shield Voznesenskii from his accusers. Although the two poets certainly shared an excitement for the American "wonders of engineering," the "capitalists," whom Maiakovskii attacked aggressively in his poems and sketches, were scarcely mentioned in Voznesenskii's collection. In this respect he clearly differed from Maiakovskii, an eager disseminator of communist ideology after 1917. But even as Voznesenskii implicitly distanced himself from the *post-revolutionary* Soviet classic, he edged closer to the early, *pre-revolutionary* Maiakovskii, the anarchic Futurist.³⁵⁵ The orientation toward the early Futurist tradition, evident in Voznesenskii's first two collections, was now expressed in a much more open fashion.

The book's enigmatic title, *Treugol'naya grusha*, which, as Nils Åke Nilsson has suggested, "gives associations, as it seems, to cubism, to the years in Russia after 1910," was already a statement of the poet's Futurist sympathies.³⁵⁶ However, the title is not merely associative, for it contains a very specific allusion. Suffice to recall the "founder of Russian Futurism," Nikolai Kul'bin, and his fascination with the triangle, which led him to organize a group of painters under this name and to sign his writings with its

³⁵³ See, for example, V. Nazarenko, "Nastuplenie ili otstuplenie," *Zvezda*, no. 7 (1962).

³⁵⁴ "Kak byt' s Voznesenskim?," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 4, 1962.

³⁵⁵ In fact, an intertextual poetic argument with the post-revolutionary Maiakovskii could already be found in the best of Voznesenskii's earlier poems, such as "Goya." Its first line, "I am Goya," can be read as a hidden polemic with Maiakovskii's famous assertion, "I am a latrine cleaner and a bard of boiled water" ("Vo ves' golos," 1930), a characteristic metaphoric description of the poet's role during the period of Socialist construction.

³⁵⁶ Nils Åke Nilsson, "The Parabola of Poetry," *Scando-Slavika*, 10 (1964): 55.

graphic representation.³⁵⁷ Although Kul'bin's concept of the triangle was never published, it was well-known to his contemporaries, who learned about it at his public lectures.³⁵⁸ For instance, it was rather accurately reproduced in the memoirs of Georgii Ivanov, who handed down to us the main connotations of Kul'bin's "triangle": «форма бытия» (form of existence) and «душа» (soul).³⁵⁹ In Voznesenskii's *Treugol'naia grusha*, the image of the triangle, chosen by Kul'bin as a symbol for a new, "free" art, seems to have a similar function. Moreover, it powerfully evokes Kul'bin's corresponding ideas: the liberation of art from imposed dogmas and the confidence of the artist in his own intuition, both of which constitute the pathos of *Treugol'naia grusha*. In this collection Voznesenskii appeared much less bound by ideology (claims of loyalty to communism and Lenin were reduced to a minimum here³⁶⁰), and more spontaneous in his aesthetic experimentation. An obvious example of this newfound freedom is the powerful opening poem, "Nochnoi aeroport v N'iu-Yorke," which begins with a cascade of daring metaphors:

Автопортрет мой, реторта неона, апостол небесных ворот –
Аэропорт!

Брежат дюралевые витражи,
точно рентгеновский снимок души.

Как это страшно, когда в тебе небо стоит
в тлеющих трассах
необыкновенных столиц!

.....

В баре, как ангелы, гаснут твои алкоголики,
ты им глаголишь!

³⁵⁷ See on this matter John E. Bowlt, *Russian art, 1875-1975: A Collection of Essays*, New York: MSS Information Corporation, 1976, 116.

³⁵⁸ The manuscript, however, survived. See Nikolai Kul'bin, "Novoe mirovozzrenie (tezisy)," TsGALI, f. 1497, op.1, ed. khr. 281.

³⁵⁹ See Georgii Ivanov's "Peterburgskie zimy" (1928): " 'Excellent, – the doctor says. – The form of existence is the triangle. Therefore, the soul is triangular. Y-y-yes, the 'patient' twitches. T-t-triangular or r-r-rectangular...' These are the founder of Russian Futurism K<ul'bin> and 'the greatest poet of the world' 'Velimir' Khlebnikov compiling the philosophical foundations of the new movement." (*Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 3, Moscow: Soglasie, 1994, 21). Compare this with the central passage from Kul'bin's manuscript: «Символ мира во всех религиях, системах и ересях от доисторических времен до нашего дня – треугольнику». (In all religions, [philosophical] systems, and heresies, from prehistoric times to our days, the world is symbolized by the triangle; "Novoe mirovozzrenie (tezisy)," TsGALI, f. 1497, op.1, ed. khr. 281).

³⁶⁰ See "Sequoia Lenina" in *Treugol'naia grusha*, 96-97.

rhythm of the march in his verse,³⁶³ Voznesenskii did the same with the beat of rock ‘n’ roll. His virtuoso “Odstuplenie v ritme rok-n-rola” is an impressive example of poetic craftsmanship:

Рок-
 н-
 ролл –
 об стену сандалии!
 Ром –
 в рот.
 Лица как неон.
 Ревет
 музыка скандальная,
 труба
 пляшет, как питон!

(Rock
 ‘n’
 roll –
 see the sandals kick!
 Down
 the drinks –
 face a neon-sign.
 Roars the music,
 scandalously rocks,
 Prances the trumpet,
 pythoness-like!)³⁶⁴

Treugol'naia grusha was a major contribution to the poet's already growing popularity. It was difficult now to buy Voznesenskii's new book, which had been published in edition of 50,000 copies, and even more difficult to get a ticket to his recital. At the same time, Voznesenskii enjoyed his first international success while touring France and Italy. He received and accepted offers from publishers, and met with celebrities, including his idol Picasso. Europeans, who had rarely seen any Russians during the Stalinist years, were impressed by this young poet, so talented, polished, and outspoken. Unlike the majority of his compatriots, Vosnesenskii was always available for media interviews, for which he was in great demand.

³⁶³ See Khardzhiev, “Marshi Maiakovskogo” in Khardzhiev, *Stat'i ob avangarde*, t. 2, 136-140.

³⁶⁴ 40 liricheskikh odstuplenii is poem *Treugol'naia grusha*, 47. Trans. by Herbert Marshall, in *Voznesensky: Selected Poems*, New-York: Hill and Wang, 1966, 77.

Voznesenskii undoubtedly considered this lexicon to be his trademark of sorts,³⁶⁸ as he would present it in the poem “Pesnia shuta”:

Я выйду, ослепший, как узник,
и выдам под хохот и вой:
«Душа – совмещенный санузел,
где прах и озноб душевой».³⁶⁹

(I will step on the stage like a prisoner blinded,
And will blurt out while the crowd jeers and howls,
“A soul is a primitive bathroom facility,
With dust and chills of a cold shower.”)

However, in contrast to Burlinuk and Kruchenykh, the “general desecration of traditional lyrical material”³⁷⁰ was not Voznesenskii’s primary goal, although a similar intention can be seen in some of his early writings:

Сколько звезд!
Как микробов
в воздухе...

(How many stars up there
Like microbes
in the air...)³⁷¹

This miniature was probably inspired by Burlinuk’s well-known line «Звезды – черви – пьяные туманом» (Stars are worms – drunk with fog)³⁷² or by the famous Maiakovskii’s «плевочки» (bits of spit),³⁷³ but such cases are rare. More often Voznesenskii’s efforts could be compared to the poetic technique of Maiakovskii in “Oblako v shtanakh”

³⁶⁸ Similar locutions have already been occasionally encountered in the works of the Futurists, meticulously collected by Kruchenykh in his book *Malakholia v kapote* (1919). Among other examples, one can find there Khlebnikov’s lines «Вечность – мой горшок / Время – подтиралка» (Eternity is my chamber pot / time is my toilet paper) as well as Burlinuk’s phrase «Отхожих мест зловонные заплаты» (Stinking patches of latrines). See also Kruchenykh’s own verses: «Если бы тошнило вас... / как меня вечерами / в книгах прочли бы вы желочь / голову увенчавши горшками» (If only you become nauseated / like I do in the evenings / You would then read all the bile in the books / Your heads crowned with chamber pots; in *Utinoe gnezdyshko... durnykh slov*, Sankt-Peterburg, 1914).

³⁶⁹ Voznesenskii. *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1983-84, t. 2, 60.

³⁷⁰ N. Khardziev and V. Trenin. *Poeticheskaia kul'tura Maiakovskogo*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970, 83.

³⁷¹ Voznesenskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 1, 150. Herbert Marshall, *Voznesensky: Selected poems*, 100.

³⁷² “Mertvoe nebo” (1913).

³⁷³ “Poslushaite!” (1914).

(1915), where, according to the scholarly description, “vulgar vocabulary collided with hyperbolized cosmic images that acted as mighty levers and conferred lofty meaning on the whole picture.”³⁷⁴ In Voznesenskii’s poetry one can easily find similar “levers.” In “Parizh bez rfm,” for example, it is the solemn «в веках» that lifts «ночные горшки» above their initial connotation. In this way the provocative ending does not contradict the rest of the poem, which expresses a fascination with Paris, but rather completes it.

The poem strikes the reader not merely with its provocative images, but also by its alternation of verse and rhythmical prose, as well as by a phantasmagoric plot with clear elements of the absurd. These poetic devices, which also can be traced to the young Maiakovskii and Khlebnikov, had been little exploited by Soviet poets, and, therefore, represented a significant creative opportunity to Voznesenskii. Inspired by the success of his previous ventures, he seemed to be ready to explore these opportunities further, but the situation, quite favorable for a few short years, unexpectedly changed. On his return from Europe, Voznesenskii was greeted with some very bad news: the authorities had just begun an official campaign against modernist artists and writers.

The campaign was launched after Khrushchev’s visit to an art exhibition where he saw experimental, modernist paintings for the first time. Outraged, the Soviet leader vented his wrath against painters and sculptors, as well as writers, and Voznesenskii became one of the first victims. During the meeting with the “creative intelligentsia,” held behind closed doors on March 7, 1963 in the Kremlin, Khrushchev yelled at the young poet, threatening to expel him from the country. This gloomy episode was recounted many years later by Voznesenskii in his memoir, which he republished on numerous occasions.³⁷⁵ In this memoir, the poet vividly depicts Khrushchev’s anger, as well as his own fear, which made him to flee Moscow and travel aimlessly around the country until the campaign eventually subsided. In his written recollections, however, Voznesenskii left out the worst moment of his entire ordeal – his forced recantation.

His recantation was made only in stages. It began with the poet’s self-critical

³⁷⁴ Khardziev and Trenin. *Poeticheskaia kul'tura Maiakovskogo*, 83.

³⁷⁵ Over time, Voznesenskii’s account of these events became more and more elaborate. See “Goluboi zal s chernym kamnem” in Andrei Voznesenskii. *Aksioma samoiska*, Ikpa, 1990, 171-180; “Moroznye foto etogo leta” in Andrei Voznesenskii. *Gadanie po knige*, Moscow: Argumenty i fakty, 1994, 191-202; “Goluboi zal Kremliia” in Andrei Voznesenskii. *Na virtual'nom vetru*, 77-89.

speech before the Board of the Soviet Writers Union on March 28, 1963. As Western commentators pointed out, it was “so vague and hollow that it could not satisfy even the most benevolent of bureaucrats.”³⁷⁶ Indeed, instead of a direct apology, Voznesenskii only acknowledged that he had been criticized, that he would not forget it, and that he intended “to work, work, and work...”³⁷⁷ The poet’s true recantation, the one which finally appeased even his sternest foes, appeared six months later in the form of a narrative poem “Lonzhumo,” published on October 13, 1963 in *Pravda*. The poem’s plot took the reader to a place near Paris, associated with Lenin, whose revolutionary deeds became the subject of Voznesenskii’s reflections. These verses were entirely in the spirit of the post-revolutionary Maiakovskii, whose narrative poems “Vladimir Il’ich Lenin” (1924) and “Khorosho!” (1927) were obviously taken as exemplars. Besides numerous verbal coincidences, these works shared, as R.D.B. Thomson has pointed out, many structural features: “an opening invocation to Time, a tripartite overall design, the device of building each episode round a single image, and the general tendency to deify Lenin as the most quintessentially human of human beings.”³⁷⁸

Needless to say, “Lonzhumo” marked an abrupt departure from Voznesenskii’s previous verses, composed either before the notorious episode in Kremlin, when he was still in France and Italy, or even in the middle of the campaign against him, while he was travelling around the Russian countryside. Paradoxically, this difficult period had turned out to be very artistically productive for Voznesenskii, who wrote at this time such poems

³⁷⁶ Pierre Forgues, “The poetry of Andrei Voznesensky,” *Survey*, no. 49 (1963) :76.

³⁷⁷ Voznesenskii’s speech was later published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, March 30, 1963.

³⁷⁸ “Andrei Voznesensky: Between Pasternak and Mayakovsky,” 55. Maiakovskii also inspired Voznesenskii to his other verses about Lenin, such as, for example, “Ia v Shushenskom” (1962). Compare the passage from “Ia v Shushenskom”: «Он строил, светел и двужилен, / страну в такие холода. Не говорите: «Если б жил он!» / Вот если б умер – что тогда?..» (Clear-minded and strong, / he built the country while it was cold. / Don’t say “what if he were alive!” / but ask “what if he had died?”) with the well known lines from “Vladimir Il’ich Lenin” (1924) «Ленин и теперь живее всех живых.» (“Lenin is now the most live of all living”; trans. by Herbert Marshall, in *Mayakovsky*, 249). Even Voznesenskii’s sensational line «Уберите Ленина с денег» (Remove Lenin’s likeness from money bills; *Zvezda vostoka*, no. 3 (1967): 19) also had a parallel in Maiakovskii’s oeuvre. See an appeal written by Maiakovskii: «Не торгуйте Лениным!» (Don’t buy and sell Lenin!), published in the first issue of LEF (1924): «Мы настаиваем: не штампуйте Ленина. Не печатайте его портретов на плакатах, на клеенках, на тарелках, на кружках, на портсигарах.» (We insist – don’t stamp Lenin’s likeness everywhere. Don’t print his portraits on posters, tablecloths, plates, mugs, cigarette-cases...) Quoted from *Vladimir Majakovskij. Memoirs and Essays*. Ed. Bengt Jangfeld, Nils Åke Nilsson, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975, 167-69.

as “Tishiny!”, “Okhota na zaitsa,” “Avtoportret,” and several others, considered by many critics to be some of his finest creations. These poems were saturated with pain and despair in stark contrast to the glamorous atmosphere of Voznesenskii’s European pieces. There we saw him chatting with Sartre in the Parisian café, here – crying in solitude in the depth of the Russian provinces. There he was a celebrity, who could afford to treat his success quite ironically; here he was an outcast, who felt like a hunted-down hare.

Obviously, the change was too dramatic for Voznesenskii to withstand the temptation to get back on the track to fame and glory as soon as possible. He decided to rehabilitate himself with the authorities. This decision predetermined not only “Lonzhumo’s” entirely conformist subject matter, but also its form, which was quite timid in comparison to his previous achievements. Not surprisingly, the poem was enthusiastically greeted by those critics who had only recently accused the poet of the most malignant formalism. As one of them, Alexandr Dymshits, wrote:

In “Lonzhumo” Voznesenskii obtained that transparent poetic form, without which people’s art is absolutely impossible. Quite recently sound play suppressed in Voznesenskii’s verses any logic, euphonic experimentation smothered any sense. Now everything is different... Quite recently he chose eccentric, extravagant images, which, in turn, led to the detriment of sense. Now everything is different... Quite recently, Voznesenskii insisted on the arbitrariness of poetic associations. In “Lonzhumo” one can find broad and sensible, realistic associations.³⁷⁹

State officials, in turn, appreciated Voznesenskii’s efforts to find a compromise with their demands, and he was quickly allowed to resume his career. The leading literary journals and newspapers began to publish Voznesenskii’s verses in almost unprecedented abundance,³⁸⁰ and his new collection, *Antimiry*, appeared the following year, 1964, with astonishing speed by Soviet standards.

Antimiry included not only Voznesenskii’s new poems, but also the old ones, taken from *Treugol’naia grusha*, as well as from his first collections *Mozaika* and *Parabola*. The poet’s ultimate goal, however, was not to present his poetic evolution accurately – from his early verses to “Lonzhumo” – but rather to downplay this very

³⁷⁹A. Dymshits, “Postigaia Lenina,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, November 12, 1963.

³⁸⁰ See, for example, Voznesenskii’s poems, collected under the title “Pochta so stikhami,” *Znamia*, no. 11 (1963): 46-69.

issue. Not by accident, the latter poem was placed – in defiance of any chronological order – among the poet’s early pieces. However, this did not mean that the poet wished to pretend that nothing had happened to him in the recent past. On the contrary, he now did his best to reassert himself after his public humiliation. Unable to express this intention openly, Voznesenskii delivered his message through the book’s carefully calculated structure. Unlike his other collections, *Antimiry* had a kind of a “prelude,” consisting of three poems, all of which referred to the poet’s forced recantation.

In the first poem, “Monolog rybaka,” Voznesenskii boldly repeats the words that he had uttered in his self-critical speech – that he would “work, work, work” – but now they sound quite different. The mask of a fisherman provides Voznesenskii with a legitimate way to speak about the pride of a true artist – «Мы боги, когда работаем» (We are Gods, when we are working)³⁸¹ – who knows the taste of ultimate freedom, which he achieves in the process of creation. This ultimate freedom, however, does not make an artist less vulnerable to outside pressure, and this important point became the subject of the “prelude’s” second poem – “Monolog Merlin Monro.” The mask of the American actress, who committed suicide in mysterious circumstances, gives Voznesenskii the opportunity to raise a question about the artist’s fate in a hostile society:

Невыносимо прожить не думая,
 невыносимее – углубиться.
 Где наши планы? Нас будто сдунули,
 существование – самоубийство,

Самоубийство – бороться с дрянью,
 самоубийство – мириться с ними,
 невыносимо, когда бездарен,
 когда талантлив – невыносимей...

(Unbearable thoughtlessly to live,
 more unbearable – deeper to delve.
 Where are our plans? They’ve blown as sky-high,
 existence is suicide.

suicide to battle with trash,
 suicide to make peace with its cash,
 unbearable, when talentless,
 when talented, unbearable no less.)³⁸²

³⁸¹ *Antimiry*, Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1964, 4.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 7. Trans. by Herbert Marshall, in *Voznesensky: Selected Poems*, 91.

The poem displays an interesting feature, which unfortunately is lost in English translation. Instead of feminine endings of adjectives, which would be appropriate in a monologue by Monroe, Voznesenskii at some point switches to masculine forms. This switch provides a clue to the reader that the poet is referring to his own experience, which also led him to a kind of self-destruction. Certainly, it was not a physical suicide but an intellectual and artistic one. Yet as the “prelude’s” third poem, “Rublevskoe shosse,” implicitly suggests, the poet cherishes the hope for a resurrection:

Улечу ли?
Кану ли?
Соколом ли?
Камнем?

Осень. Небеса.
Красные леса.

(Do I fly?
Do I pass by
A hawk am I?
A stone am I?

The heavens. Autumn.
Forest crimson.)³⁸³

Although Voznesenskii leaves all these questions unanswered, the poem sounds quite optimistic, especially in the context of the rest of the book. Despite the presence of “Lonzhumo” and some of his early “Lenin” poems, which the poet republished in *Antimiry*, the collection still produced a strong impression. This was due primarily to the inclusion of works like the above-mentioned “Tishiny!” and “Okhota na zaitsa” as well as Voznesenskii’s European poems, such as “Parizh bez rifm,” which were placed at the beginning of the book as the poet’s latest accomplishments. They looked spectacular even in comparison with the best of *Treugol’naia grusha*, strongly suggesting that Voznesenskii had been interrupted at the height of his creative powers. This gave his readers hope that he would once again “fly” as “a hawk” (using the poet’s own words) as soon as he had fully recovered from the shock caused by the infamous campaign.

But sadly, the poet was never to recover completely, and Voznesenskii was the first to recognize this fact with an amazing clarity. And he had sufficient courage not only

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 10. Trans. by Herbert Marshall, *Ibid.*, 67.

place in his poetry.

Akhillesovo serdtse consists mainly of Voznesenskii's earlier works; "Plach po dvum nerozhdennym poemam" was one of the few new pieces in the collection. It was also the best of them, since another new work, the long and very ambitious narrative poem "Oza" (1964), produces an uneven impression. Of course, it contains some felicitous fragments – mostly satirical ones, many of which are written in rhythmical prose, such as the scene of a birthday party held in the Moscow restaurant "Berlin." The lyrical fragments, dedicated to the woman the poet had recently married, the fiction writer Zoia Boguslavskaia ("Oza" is an anagram of Zoia) are also of decent quality. Yet taken as a whole, the poem obviously lacks coherence. Although "Oza" is clearly designed to invite analysis (it has several narrative levels each underscored by a different typeface),³⁸⁷ there is an unfortunate preponderance of clichés, which disappoints the thoughtful reader.

Sometimes, the poem's superficiality had been blamed on the censors, who cut out a one-page passage about Stalin from the original version of "Oza," published two years earlier in the literary monthly *Molodaia gvardiia* (no. 10, 1964). Indeed, this passage is crucial for understanding the poem's underlying theme – the suppression of the individual by the totalitarian regime, but this very topic appeared to be underdeveloped in the rest of the poem. Obviously, it was Voznesenskii's self-censorship that had prevented him from a thorough exploration of this important, though sensitive, subject. The poet's self-censorship also forced him to set limits to his formal experiments, which otherwise would probably have been more radical in "Oza." Although the poem boasted such new (for the poet) technique as the use of several different typefaces, which significantly enhanced its presentational qualities, in other ways "Oza" appeared to be much less innovative than Voznesenskii's previous works.

All this made "Oza" a kind of surrogate poem, which Voznesenskii offered the public instead of those "aborted" pieces that he mourned in his "Plach po dvum nerozhdennym poemam." Not coincidentally, he returns to the theme of "Plach..." once again in the collection *Akhillesovo serdtse*, in the poem "Monolog aktiora," which he

³⁸⁷ For such analysis see, for example, Gerald Janecek, "Many Faces of Voznesenskii's 'Oza'," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 14, no. 4 (1980): 449–465.

placed at the very end of the book, forming a kind of sorrowful coda. In this piece Voznesenskii repeats almost word for word his previous self-accusations:

Как девочка после аборта,
пустой и притихший весь,
люблю тоскою аортовой
свою нерожденную вещь.³⁸⁸

(As a girl after an abortion,
empty and hushed,
I long with aortal anguish
for my unborn song.)

“Monolog aktiora,” however, gives the theme a new twist. In the poem’s first stanzas the poet speaks not only about his own sin, but also about the sin of the public who continued to applaud his new works, not understanding that something had gone terribly wrong for the author. Boos and outrage seem a much more appropriate reaction in this situation, and Voznesenskii addresses his audience with the extravagant plea: «Провала прошу, провала» (I am begging for a flop, a flop). Certainly, this hysterical request was not granted: the public remained extremely loyal to the poet.

Suffice it to say that all 100,000 copies of *Akhillesovo serdtse* were sold out at once. “Oza,” in particular, became especially popular, although mainly in the form of fragments, some of which were included in the theatrical performance *Antimiry* (based on a recitation of Voznesenskii’s verses) that was produced by the famous Taganka Theatre.

Critical responses to *Akhillesovo serdtse*, in turn, were mainly favorable, although “Oza” became an object of certain controversy. Paradoxically, this time the sharpest criticism came from the liberal critics, such as Stanislav Rassadin, who drew attention to the poem’s serious artistic pitfalls.³⁸⁹ In the West, however, “Oza” was generally perceived as Voznesenskii’s major accomplishment, most likely because of the “Stalin” passage, which was praised as the first satirical treatment of the subject to appear in print in the Soviet Union. The poem was promptly translated and included (with some compositional changes) in one of Voznesenskii’s most ambitious bilingual collections – *Antiworlds and the Fifth Ace* (1967), which contained the best of the poet’s earlier works.

³⁸⁸ *Akhillesovo serdtse*, 255.

³⁸⁹ “Pokhozhe na vsio nepokhozhee,” *Voprosy literatury*, no. 4 (1965): 36-55.

The translations for this collection were done by several prominent authors, among them W. H. Auden, who also wrote a complimentary foreword, in which he praised Voznesenskii's exquisite craftsmanship. In addition, the collection featured a detailed introduction by the editors, Patricia Blake and Max Hayward, who recounted Voznesenskii's triumphant career in poetry, simultaneously depicting him as a kind of a political dissident.

This was certainly not the case, although the poet was not safe at this point from an occasional setback, like the censor's assault on "Oza" or the last-minute cancellation of his trip to the United States in 1967. The cancellation raised such an outcry in the world press that the Soviet authorities thought it best to back down. Several months later Voznesenskii was given a position on the board of the Soviet Writers Union, which brought him immunity from future political troubles. It was an official recognition of his place in the literary establishment, where he was accepted as the direct descendant of the post-revolutionary Maiakovskii, to whom he had customarily been compared ever since the publication of "Lonzhumo."

Voznesenskii's debt to Maiakovskii was an idea thoroughly elaborated in the monograph on the poet, written by the influential critic Aleksandr Mikhailov.³⁹⁰ He closely analyzed Voznesenskii's poetry from his first publications up to *Akhillesovo serdtse*, arriving at the conclusion that the poet had inherited from Maiakovskii not simply the urge for formal innovation (not too radical, though), but a profound loyalty to communist ideals as well. Of course, such an interpretation of Voznesenskii's poetry was far from being accurate (the critic preferred not to notice the poet's argument with the post-revolutionary Maiakovskii, which was evident in Voznesenskii's best poems), but it perfectly reflected the official expectations which the poet was supposed to meet.

Although this task, as one could conclude from his "Plach po dvum nerozhdennym poemam" and "Monolog aktiora," seemed almost unbearable at the beginning, Voznesenskii obviously became accustomed to it over time. The pain and anguish that had saturated *Antimiry* and *Akhillesovo serdtse* became much less pronounced in his next collection – *Ten' zvuka*, published in 1970. New poems, which this time made up about a half of the book, demonstrated that the feeling of harmony

³⁹⁰ *Andrei Voznesenskii*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1970.

simultaneously it is very typical for the collection. Voznesenskii's extraordinary metaphoric skill, so visibly suppressed in his previous book, reappeared here with all its former intensity, leading Valentin Kataev, the author of the preface to *Ten' zvuka*, to define Voznesenskii's poetry as a "depot of metaphors."³⁹³ This definition precisely indicated the most impressive trait of the collection, but it was not as flattering as it might seem at the first glance. In fact, it might rather be interpreted as a polite acknowledgment of Voznesenskii's lack of any significant development, since the same comment could have been made about his much earlier poems, compiled in *Treugol'naia grusha* and (partially) *Antimiri*. Moreover, one of these poems, "Parizh bez rfm" was obviously used as a model for the most impressive pieces of *Ten' zvuka*, like "Obshchii pliazh no. 2" and "Moroznyi ippodrom v Zal'tsburge" (known in English translation as "Winter at the Track"). The similarities between these poems reached far beyond their defiant imagery and included such devices as the alternation of different metrical patterns, as well as the characteristic combination of verse and rhythmical prose. Thus most reviewers of *Ten' zvuka* commented on its quality of self-repetition.³⁹⁴

One of them, the fellow poet Evgenii Evtushenko, enthusiastically praised Voznesenskii for his past and current accomplishments but firmly warned him about the danger of artistic wheel-spinning: "The poet became different – that means that his poems must become different."³⁹⁵ Evtushenko saw the potential of the successful growth in Voznesenskii's simplification of the poetic form and his more straightforward discussion of public issues, while at the same time disregarding Voznesenskii's efforts to achieve the same goal by means of formal experimentation.

However, such efforts were quite evident in *Ten' zvuka*, which contained experiments in visual poetry, termed by the poet "Izopy": a cock-fight drawn with words and letters, the palindrome line about a moon, «А луна канула»³⁹⁶ bent in the shape of

³⁹³ *Ten' zvuka*, 7.

³⁹⁴ R.D.B. Thomson also pointed out that in *Ten' zvuka* "the unpleasant features of all Voznesensky's works, occasional vulgarity and superficiality, and a disturbing weakness for name-dropping seem to have become rather more pronounced." ("Andrei Voznesensky: Between Pasternak and Mayakovsky," 59).

³⁹⁵ Evgenii Evtushenko. "Chtoby golos obrest' – nado krupno rasstat'sia...," *Novyi mir*, no. 8 (1970): 258.

³⁹⁶ Compare it with Valerii Briusov's palindromic line «А луна тонула» (from his poem "V dorozhnom polusne." 1918).

the crescent, and similar pieces. Although Voznesenskii's poems looked rather timid in comparison either to the Futurists' experiments in this genre,³⁹⁷ or to the current production of the underground poets, the very fact of the publication was quite remarkable. This kind of poetry, denounced as "formalism," had not been allowed in print for many years, and such a precedent looked very promising. But, as it soon turned out, it was nothing more than an isolated episode. "Izopy" received little understanding not only from Evtushenko and the other reviewers of *Ten' zvuka*, but, most importantly, from the authorities, who appeared to be particularly unenthusiastic about visual poetry.

It did not take long for Voznesenskii to figure out that this kind of experimentation could not be continued in the open, and this forced him to abandon it for almost twenty years. His next collection, *Vzgliad*, published in 1972, did not contain any experiments of this or any other kind, and even the flow of metaphors, so intense in his previous book, practically dried up. Although it was hardly a matter of natural poetic evolution, but rather another act of surrender (it was no coincidence that as soon as visual poetry became permissible in Russia Voznesenskii rushed to return to it), the poet accepted the situation without complaint. As Evtushenko and some other reviewers suggested, he turned more directly to social issues, compensating for this decline in artistic audacity with a calculated amount of ideological bravado. This change in direction did not cause Voznesenskii any trouble with the authorities (his official status became even more secure³⁹⁸), but helped him to maintain a high level of popularity throughout the 1970s, when he wrote his most famous "civic" poems: "Pomografiia dukha," "Smert' Shukshina," "Est' russkaia intelligentsia," and, especially, "Nostal'giia po nastoiashchemu."

The latter poem provided a title for Voznesenskii's bilingual collection *Nostalgia for the Present* (1978), which contained the poet's latest verses. The book has two forewords, one of which was written by Edward M. Kennedy, who warmly recalled his informal meetings with the poet, and the other by Arthur Miller, who devoted his

³⁹⁷ Not accidentally, the critics compared "Izopy" not to the Futurist's experiments in this genre, but to the exercises of the minor Symbolist poet Ivan Rukavishnikov, who created traditional figure poems. See Rassadin, "Beru moe," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 27, 1975.

³⁹⁸ In 1978, Voznesenskii was awarded the State Prize for poetry for his collection *Nostal'giia po nastoiashchemu* (1976).

attention to a discussion of Voznesenskii's poetry. In spite of Voznesenskii's studied political ingenuousness, Miller declared that it "cut close to the bone on sensitive public issues."³⁹⁹ Not all Western readers agreed, however. Clive James' article "Voznesensky's Case," seriously questioned the poet's reputation as a rebel, which he had managed to maintain despite a long record of compromises with the Soviet authorities.⁴⁰⁰ Going through Voznesenskii's poems one after another, the critic showed that the poet never dared "to state a plain truth about his own time and place," keeping his criticism well within the limits imposed by official censorship.⁴⁰¹ In Clive James' opinion, this called into question the artistic value of Voznesenskii's work, making him a perfect example of a Soviet poet who had swapped his talent for a successful career.

Of course, such a frank discussion of Voznesenskii's "case" would have been inconceivable in the poet's own country at the end of the 1970s, but the situation changed ten years later, with the beginning of *perestroika*, when an article with a surprisingly similar title, "Fenomen Voznesenskogo," appeared in the literary monthly *Novyi mir*.⁴⁰² Its author was a well-known political dissident, Lev Timofeev, who, like James, concentrated on Voznesenskii's "civic" poems, convincingly arguing that they were superficial and conformist. Timofeev's article was the last in a series of blows on Voznesenskii's image as a rebel. Since the mid-1980s the dramatic political changes in the Soviet Union had been bringing to prominence formerly underground writers, whose uncompromising attitude towards the system compared all too favorably with Voznesenskii's decades-long efforts to be a literary outcast with a state pension.

Understandably unable to see any point in continuing as a civic poet, Voznesenskii made a major attempt to recover his former status as a daring, experimental artist, since this was now completely safe. His collection *Aksioma samoiska* (1990) exposed a veritable arsenal of the most radical Futurist devices, including *zaum'*, visual poetry, and palindromes.

The book's title is itself a palindrome, thereby setting a tone for the collection as a

³⁹⁹ *Nostalgia for the Present*, xi.

⁴⁰⁰ *The New York Review*, August 16, 1979.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁰² Lev Timofeev, "Fenomen Voznesenskogo," *Novyi mir*, no. 2 (1989): 243-256.

whole. Indeed, one could find here not only isolated lines or stanzas, but whole poems composed entirely of palindromes. However, most of them look rather unimpressive, comparing unfavorably not only with Klebnikov's famous experiments in this genre, but also with the works of the modern, formerly underground poets, such as Valentin Khromov. Only a few of Voznesenskii's pieces, display a certain inventiveness, as, for example, "Rembo pered zerkalom":

РЕМБО ОБМЕР
 ЗЕРКАЛО ПОЛА КРЕЗ
 ТЕЛЕКС – СКЕЛЕТ
 ОВИР КРИВО
 ЦЕМЕНТ НЕМЕЦ
 А НА НЕБЕ...⁴⁰³

Although the first five lines are rather unexceptional, the sixth and the final one, "А на небе..." (But at the skies...), deserves attention. Unlike the rest of the poem, this is not a palindrome, but an anagram, which, when read backward, has a different meaning than when read forward. Thus, the lofty phrase "But at the skies..." turns into an "unpublishable" obscenity, as soon as the reader inverts it. This result is a witty affirmation of Khlebnikov's concept of the anagram as a unity of the opposites,⁴⁰⁴ but the "dirty" subject matter of the line brings to mind Kruchenykh, to whom Voznesenskii is also indebted here. Indeed, in his book *Malakholia v kapote*, Kruchenykh engaged readers in similar linguistic games, inviting them to search for concealed obscenities in the text.

Not surprisingly, one of Kruchenykh's most famous lines – «дыр бул шыл» – appears as quotation in *Aksioma samoiska*, extended by Voznesenskii in a very characteristic manner:

Дырбулшил!
 Д-р Булшит.⁴⁰⁵

For a reader who is not familiar with English vulgarisms, the expression «Д-р Булшит» is deprived of its original meaning and sounds exactly like *zaum*, Kruchenykh's

⁴⁰³ *Aksioma samoiska*, 122.

⁴⁰⁴ "Neizdannaiia stat'ia," in *Sobranie proizvedenii Velimira Khlebnikova v 5 tomakh*, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1933, t. 5, 190.

⁴⁰⁵ *Aksioma samoiska*, 60.

invention. It is also known that Kruchenykh himself used to interpret Russian transcriptions of foreign words as “real” *zaum*, finding similar examples not only in the texts of the Futurists, but also in those of writers alien to this movement: Vsevolod Ivanov, Leonid Leonov, and Lidiia Seifullina.⁴⁰⁶ Kruchenykh pointed to their usage of Bashkir, Kyrgyz, and Tatar phrases in Russian transcription, whose murky meaning enhanced their unusual sound, adding to the poems a singular kind of expressiveness.

Voznesenskii was undoubtedly fully aware of the device and its impressive potential. In one of his earlier poems “Skrymtymnym” (1970) he uses the strangely sounding word «скрымтымным», which he may have heard during his trip to Siberia. He does not provide (and may not even have known) its translation:

«Скрымтымным» – это пляшут омичи?
Скрип темниц? или крик о помощи?
Или у Судьбы есть псевдоним,
Темная ухмылочка скрымтымным?
.....
Скрымтымным – языков праматерь.
Глупо верить разуму, глупо спорить с ним.
Планы прогнозируем по сопромату
Но часто не учитываем скрымтымным...⁴⁰⁷

(“Skrymtymnym” – isn’t it a dance in Omsk?
The squeak of a cell door? a cry for help?
Or maybe Fate has a pseudonym,
An ominous grin – skrymtymnym?
.....
Skrymtymnym – the mother of tongues.
It’s silly to trust reason, silly to oppose it.
We devise our plans using calculus,
But often don’t account for skrymtymnym...)

The poem vividly expressed the poet’s desire to experiment with a foreign language in Russian transcription, but instead of turning to more or less exotic tongues (something that Kruchenykh insisted on) Voznesenskii for the most part employed exclusively

⁴⁰⁶ See Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Novoe v pisatel'skoi tekhnike*, Moscow: Izdanie Vserossiiskogo Soiuza Poetov, 1927, 1-29.

⁴⁰⁷ Voznesenskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 1, 310.

English.⁴⁰⁸ Experiments of this kind can be found already in his early verses,⁴⁰⁹ but in *Aksioma samoiska Voznesenskii* began to use this device much more extensively and freely. He continued to do so in his next collection *Gadanie po knige* (1994), where almost every poem contains English words, not only in Russian transcription, but in their original form as well: «Мы снова к новому preparing» (Again we готовимся for something new), or: «Что с нами будет after?» (What will happen to us после?), or: «...свей гнездо ласточка, говорю serious, / свей гнездо swallow» (...build a nest, swallow, I tell серьезный, / build a nest ласточка).⁴¹⁰

The poet apparently believed that such a mixture not only of languages but also of alphabets would powerfully enhance the *zaum*' energy of the text, but it did not happen. English would appear to be the least suitable language for this purpose because it is so widely used in post-Soviet Russia. Since the beginning of the 1990s, it has become very difficult to “defamiliarize” almost any of English words: the average educated Russian reader most likely knows what they mean and how they are pronounced. This fact dramatically reduced the *zaum*' effect of Voznesenskii's later verses, simultaneously linking them to the tradition of macaronic poetry, as represented, for example, by Ivan Miatlev's narrative poem “Sensatsii i zamechaniia gospozhi Kurdiukovoi” (1840-1844). Unlike Miatlev, however, whose heroine spoke in a parodic mixture of Russian and French, Voznesenskii's poetic persona is a very earnest one, and does not seem to feel any embarrassment at his consistent usage of double Dutch. The poet even allows himself to make some obvious English mistakes as when he confuses an adjective with an adverb in the quotation above (“говорю serious”). Of course, it is possible that Vosnesenskii

⁴⁰⁸ One of the rare examples of effective usage of English as *zaum*' is Nikolai Aseev's poem “Rabota” (1923), in which he employs the abbreviation IWW in Russian transcription: «Ай, дабль, даблью. / Блеск домн. / Стоп! / Лью!.. etc.» (IWW / The shine of smokestacks. / Stop! / I pour!..; in *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, t. 1, 208).

⁴⁰⁹ In the poem “Gripp Gonkong-69” (1969) a complete English sentence occurs: «Гонконг гоу хоум!» (*Sobranie sochinenii v 3 tomakh*, t. 1, 300). Its poetic value was determined not by its immediate meaning, which in the 1960s was not necessarily evident to an average Russian reader, but rather by its aural quality, which transformed it into a kind of voodoo chant. In the poem “Iabloki s britvami” (1974), a similar role was played by the word “Halloween” in a Russian transcription, which sounded strange and even sinister for most readers, who were completely unaware of this American tradition.

⁴¹⁰ *Gadanie po knige*, 40, 160, 12, respectively.

made this mistake intentionally (in accordance with Kruchenykh's advice⁴¹¹), although his other verse production does not suggest this kind of self-deprecation. Voznesenskii's recent works reflect his close familiarity with Kruchenykh's other linguistic ideas, such as the so-called *sdvig*, which he formulated in "Sdvigologiiia russkogo stikha" (1922).⁴¹² In contrast to his experiments with foreign words, Voznesenskii employs *sdvig* more effectively and even creatively modifies the device as compared with Kruchenykh's original version. Instead of splicing adjacent words together, as Kruchenykh suggested, Voznesenskii repeatedly iterates the same word, thus generating new meanings. Often, the poet combines *sdvig* with other devices, as happens in the poem "Posle signala." This piece contains a chaotic and overflowing stream of messages taken from poetic persona's answering machine, and it ends wildly as well. The phrase «после сигнала» (after the tone) is transmuted into the enigmatic words «слепогналаси» (blindly chasing), and then returns the reader to the initial expression:

После сигнала...

слепо...

гналаси...

слепослепослепослеΣпосле после после ПОСЛЕ

гналасигналасигнала СИГНАЛА⁴¹³

These linguistic transformations add a certain pep to the poem, lifting it above a celebrity's trivial complaints about being in constant demand.

In addition to the afore-mentioned features, "Posle signala" demonstrates another interesting trait, the presence of the Greek letter Σ, the mathematical symbol of a sum, inserted in the middle of the line. Such use of mathematical symbols can also be traced back to the tradition of the Futurists, who employed this device extensively. Here is a characteristic stanza from one of David Burliuk's poems:

Паровозик как птичка

Свиснул и нет

Луна = кавычка +

Возвышенный предмет⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ See his "New Ways of the Word," in *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, 73.

⁴¹² A. Kruchenykh. *Sdvigologiiia russkogo stikha*, Moscow: MAF, 1922.

⁴¹³ *Aksioma samoiska*, 17.

⁴¹⁴ *Pervyi zhurnal russkikh futuristov*, 39.

(A little engine like a bird
Whistled and was gone
Moon = quotation mark +
A sublime subject)

This stanza probably inspired one of Voznesenskii's later poems, which shows, however, a disturbing similarity to Burliuk's original:

А к вечеру Луна + Солнце,
Подчеркнутые линией хлебов.
«Я + Ты» – стоит над горизонтом
«Небо + я = любовь».⁴¹⁵

(In the evening Moon + Sun
Underscored by the silhouette of the wheat.
“Me + You” looms above the horizon.
“Sky + I = love.”)

The importance of mathematical, musical, cartographical, and other signs was discussed in the article “Poeticheskie nachala” (1914), written by the Burliuk brothers, who called on writers not to ignore “the aesthetic life of all those $\int \sim + \xi \times \sqrt{=} > \Delta$ etc. etc.”⁴¹⁶ In this article they also touched upon other aspects of the Futurist aesthetic, in particular, the role of typefaces, although the two authors believed that this subject was “obvious to everyone.”⁴¹⁷ It was certainly obvious to Voznesenskii, who has always liked to play with different typefaces. Still, he has never been as ingenious in this respect as some of the Futurists, especially Kruchenykh and Vasilii Kamenskii.⁴¹⁸ In most of his poems Voznesenskii shows himself to be a rather modest follower of David Burliuk, primarily emphasizing key words by different visual means.⁴¹⁹ This play with typefaces can be found in all of Voznesenskii's collections, but it definitely reaches its peak in *Aksioma samoiska*, together with the other poetic devices mentioned by the Burliuk

⁴¹⁵ *Aksioma samoiska*, 27.

⁴¹⁶ In *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes*, 83.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴¹⁸ See Gerald Janeczek, *The Look of Russian Literature. Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900-1930*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 156-64; 185-86.

⁴¹⁹ Voznesenskii showed a different and more promising use of typefaces in his narrative poem “Oza” (1964), in which he initially employed six different typefaces, but he did not continue with this kind of experimentation. Moreover, in subsequent publications of “Oza,” he reduced the number of the typefaces to two main ones. (See Janeczek, “Many Faces of Voznesenskii's ‘Oza,’ ” 464).

brothers. In particular, Voznesenskii made wide use of visual poetry, which was enthusiastically promoted in “Poeticheskie nachala”:

The layout of the written text on the whole field is of tremendous importance. This was very well understood by those refined Alexandrians, Apollonius of Rhodes and Callimachus, who arranged the written text in the shape of lyres, vases, swords, etc., etc.⁴²⁰

If we recall, Voznesenskii first turned to this genre in *Ten' zvuka* (1970), but then abandoned it for several decades. He comes back to it in *Aksioma samoiska*, which features a significant number of visual poems. Here is one of them, dedicated to the ancient Sukharev tower, which was demolished in the 1930s along with many other historic buildings in downtown Moscow:

Я
 башня
 Сухарева
 бодренькая
 буржуйская
 сурмяшная
 несущая
 тельце сукровицы
 убивая мажорками
 с ромбика и кубиками
 Иван Великий жемчуг
 На Сухаревой башенке
 В Москве землетрясение
 как брачная процессия
 спайте нити сооруженно
 на белке хоромы
 сто лет стойте
 Иван Великий жемчуг
 на Сухаревой башенке
 а ее строителю Четловку
 красные дорожки застелить велите!
 почему ж повалены молотом толо?

С Ух! рух
 вера а-а реа

По Сухаревой башне рыдай, Иван Великий!
 Над Москвой белесет одолевший столп.

The work belongs to the tradition of the so-called “shaped poetry,” which Voznesenskii explores in *Aksioma samoiska*, faithfully following, as one might assume,

⁴²⁰ *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes*, 83.

recommendations of the Burliuk brothers. However, their reference to the visual poetry of the past did not mean to encourage, as one scholar noted, “the production of more shaped poems of the same kind,” but rather to extend “the principle of revitalized typography in other directions.”⁴²¹ Not surprisingly, many of Voznesenskii’s visual poems look rather dated in comparison to the Futurists’ own accomplishments in this genre, especially Kamenskii’s “ferro-concrete” poems. Of course, Kamenskii’s famous experiments were not completely ignored by Voznesenskii, who emulates some of them, in particular, “Solntse,” in several of his pieces, such as “Raskladnoe zerkal’tse,” but with decidedly more modest results.

Clearly, Voznesenskii himself was not very happy with his achievements in this area. In his next collection, *Gadanie po knige* (1994), he began to use a new technique for the creation of visual poems.⁴²² Although he still arranges the written words in various shapes (such as a flower, a saint’s nimbus, etc.), the text itself looks different. In many cases, it is reduced to a sequence of an iterated word, which undergoes perpetual semantic transformations. One such piece, written, incidentally, in English, hinges on the transformation of the word “hits” into “shit,” and vice versa, while the entire sequence takes the highly suggestive form of a hollow circle:⁴²³



⁴²¹ John J. White, *Literary Futurism. Aspects of the First Avant-garde*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, 47.

⁴²² Along with the visual poems, Voznesenskii created a series of collages, which he called “Vidiomy.” See John Russel, “A Russian Poet Finds a New Poetry in Collage,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 1991. Voznesenskii exhibited his collages in art museums and galleries in Russia and abroad, simultaneously reproducing them in his poetic collections. See *Vidiomy*, Moscow: RIK, 1992; see also *Gadanie po knige*, 272-288.

⁴²³ *Gadanie po knige*, 108.

Trying to explain his innovation to readers, Voznesenskii wrote: “A new phenomenon of the language has been revealed to me: a circular movement of meaning, I would call this genre ‘slovaly,’ or, more scientifically, ‘krugomety.’ ”⁴²⁴ In *Gdanie po knige*, the poet offered the reader a whole series of such “krugomety,” which were rather diverse in subject and shape.

Voznesenskii continued to employ this technique extensively in his next collection *Casino “Rossiia”* (1997). Its largest and most ambitious piece – the eponymous narrative poem – is saturated with visual fragments painstakingly incorporated in the text. However, the majority of these “krugomety” look rather plain, indicating perhaps that the poet had exhausted the potential of this device. Paradoxically, Voznesenskii’s first experiment in this genre, the “philosophical circle,” “T’mat’,” which he composed in the late 1970s, appeared to be the most striking.⁴²⁵ The subsequent visual poems were less ingenious, and their quality continued to deteriorate.

Still, “krugomety” may be considered a true invention of Voznesenskii, who took Kruchenykh’s idea of *sdvig* and developed it further. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of other Futurist devices that the poet employed in his verse – palindromes, *zaum’*, the use of various typefaces, etc. As his poems demonstrate, Voznesenskii failed to adopt these devices in a thoughtful, creative manner, turning his potentially productive engagement with Futurism into a form of binding dependence on it.

In the beginning, the poet’s relationship with that violently interrupted tradition was unquestionably fruitful. His strong interest in the Futurists’ innovations did not prevent Voznesenskii from finding his own poetic identity; indeed, it helped him. He continued to develop rapidly as an artist, until outside pressures forced Voznesenskii to abandon the tradition that seemed to provide the most natural aesthetic home for him. The poet scurried back to it many years later, but this time the results were very mixed. He meticulously followed even the minor recommendations of his Futurist teachers, in the process losing sight of the most important one – the emphasis on novelty.

Naturally, Voznesenskii has a different opinion on this matter, which he actively

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴²⁵ It was first published in the unofficial literary almanac *Metropol’* (1979) and then reprinted in *Aksioma samoiska*.

promotes in readers' minds:

Мой путь прямой и безошибочный
как пищевод шпагоглотателя.⁴²⁶

(My path is straight and unerring
like the gullet of a sword-swallower.)

Some comments, however, are in order. His path, indeed, was “straight and unerring” in terms of achieving a triumphant career, but it was hardly so as far as the loyalty to his poetic calling was concerned. In this respect his path was rather winding, leading the poet to far less impressive results.

VSEVOLOD NEKRASOV

Vsevolod Nekrasov was born in Moscow on March 24, 1934. He does not provide any details about his childhood in his autobiographical notes,⁴²⁷ but in one of his poems he recalls – with bitter irony – his early days of happiness in Stalin’s Russia on the eve of World War II:

мой
папа и мама*
Москва
трамвайная
если завтра война
и тоже жили
скажи
при папе и при маме
прибавь
при папе маме
и при Папанине⁴²⁸

* и мало этого
и я сам

⁴²⁶ *Gadanie po knige*, 137.

⁴²⁷ Vsevolod Nekrasov, “Predystoriia,” *Russkii Zhurnal*, 9 (1997) < http://www.russ.ru/journal/ist_sovr/07-09-98/nekra.htm >.

⁴²⁸ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 39.

(my
 dad and mom*
 Moscow
 full of trams
 if the war breaks out tomorrow
 and well we lived
 didn't we
 with dad and mom
 and add
 with dad and mom
 and with Papanin
 * and moreover
 me as well)

Indeed, he had it all: a loving family (both parents were still alive and living together), powerful role models, such as heroic polar explorer Papanin,⁴²⁹ whose last name (“papania” = “daddy”) sounds so paternal and reassuring to Russian ears, and a seemingly strong homeland, whose military might was glorified in the popular movie, *Esli zavtra voina* (If the War Breaks Out Tomorrow). Needless to say, in only a few years this world, which had seemed so safe and stable, would lay in ruins.

The war with Germany, which broke out in 1941, had nothing in common with what the movie *Esli zavtra voina* had promised. Within a few months the Germans were preparing to seize Moscow, and Nekrasov's family (both of his parents were school teachers) were evacuated to the city of Kazan'. They returned to the capital in 1943, where shortly afterwards Nekrasov's parents divorced. His father died in 1944, his mother three years later, and the thirteen-year-old boy had to stay with his new stepfather's family.

Although there was constant tension between Nekrasov and his new relatives, they, as he would later recall, had an important impact on the development of his personality.⁴³⁰ In particular, they influenced his literary tastes, especially his love of parody and pastiche, which he sampled and enjoyed in the prose of Zoshchenko and Ilf

⁴²⁹ Ivan Dmitrievich Papanin (1894-1986), a participant in a number of Arctic expeditions (from 1931 to 1938), which were highly publicized by the Soviet media.

⁴³⁰ “Predystoriia.”

and Petrov. His relatives also helped Nekrasov rid himself of any illusions about Stalin, whom they were brave enough to criticize, albeit behind closed doors.

In 1953 Nekrasov graduated from high school and entered the Moscow Institute of Economics and Management, from which he dropped out after a year. He had come to the conclusion that he was mostly interested in literature and ended up in the department of Philology at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute, which he attended in the late 1950s.

By that time Nekrasov had already written some poetry, but was deeply unhappy with the results. He was clearly attracted to the avant-garde tradition (the early Maiakovskii was his favorite poet), but was unable to locate any significant trace of this tradition in contemporary verse. This he found quite disappointing. Nekrasov longed for what he called “truly modern poetry.”⁴³¹ As he eventually discovered, such poetry did indeed exist, but was not allowed into print in the Soviet Union. It circulated only in samizdat, to which he finally gained access with the help of a friend, Al’bert Rusanov, who had connections in underground circles.⁴³² In his memoirs, “Predystoriia,” Vsevolod Nekrasov recalls:

<...> And if my poetry was indebted to anyone personally, then (not counting my love affairs) this would be first and foremost Alik Rusanov, my buddy since the first grade. That winter of ’54 - ’55 he took charge of my literary tutelage. He introduced me to Mandelstam <...>, then to Oleinikov and Glazkov, to the latter even in person. My personal contacts with Glazkov did not really benefit me, nor was I particularly interested in him, and Uncle Kolia Glazkov fooled around as much as he could, in his usual manner, but what was important was my realization that poetry of the highest caliber (as the modern saying goes) was being written in the here and now, before our very eyes.⁴³³

Nekrasov’s exposure to Glazkov’s samizdat poems turned out to have special significance for the young poet. In a recent interview he calls Glazkov his first teacher:

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² Al’bert Rusanov (b.1936) was an active participant in the publication of the samizdat journal *Sintaksis* (1959-60). Although Rusanov studied engineering, in the mid-1950s he also wrote poetry, which circulated in samizdat. One of his poetic productions was a long poem, “Glazkoviada” (written in collaboration with S. Kruzhkov), dedicated to Glazkov, with whom Rusanov was well acquainted. In “Glazkoviada” the authors touched upon the poet’s favorite themes – alcohol, women, etc., parodying “Oдиночество,” “Po glazkovskiu mestam,” and some of his other works. “Glazkoviada” survived in the form of a samizdat book, the title page of which reads: M.[oscow], [publishing house] “Kokteil’,” 1955 (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 105).

⁴³³ “Predystoriia.”

Generally, as far as my poetic apprenticeship as such is concerned, I would say my mentor was Glazkov. But it was a very difficult period for me, since his poetic diction was too overwhelming; and I had great respect for Glazkov. And I still feel this respect; I still consider Glazkov an important figure.⁴³⁴

Indeed, this Glazkavian intonation was rather noticeable in Nekrasov's early poems,⁴³⁵ especially in those where he still employed the traditional metrical system, which he would soon abandon. In the late 1950s Nekrasov turned to free verse, following the general trend in experimental poetry in both Russia and in the West.⁴³⁶ Nekrasov completely abandoned punctuation as well,⁴³⁷ and this gave his poems that "avant-garde" look which Glazkov's poems typically lacked. But the element that Nekrasov really adopted from his mentor, retaining it for further development, was his ironic attitude to the ideological environment, which indeed was the most unique feature of Glazkov's samizdat texts. As Nekrasov would explain later, "at that time [the mid-1950s] we found in Glazkov's poetry the pinnacle of the Great Parody, which meant so much to all of us..."⁴³⁸

In this passage Nekrasov evidently refers to Glazkov's ironic play with ideological clichés, which he describes as "a modern technique... which was needed like oxygen."⁴³⁹ As we may recall, in his early samizdat poems Glazkov constantly toyed with the words «гений» (genius), «великий» (great), «основоположник» (founder) and

⁴³⁴ "Stikhi – eto to, chto zapominaetsia," in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fakt*, 334.

⁴³⁵ See the poem "P'iani chelovek," in which Nekrasov also touches upon Glazkov's favorite theme of heavy drinking: «Я в центре всего – / Посредине улицы. / И вокруг меня оно – / Все / Группируется. / И плюс ко всему, / По вкусу моему / Драпируется. // Тепло, хорошо. / Главное – мягко... / Веселый снежок – белая травка. / Совсем я не пьян – / Все понимаю: / Седьмого ноября / Первое мая.» (I'm at the center of it all – / In the middle of the street. / And around me it / Is grouped together. / And in addition to all this, / In accordance with my taste / It is being draped. // I feel warm, good. / Most importantly – I feel softness. / Happy snow – white grass. / I'm not drunk at all – / I understand everything: / November the seventh – May the first; *Syntaksis*, no. 1, 1959 (reprinted in *Grani*, no. 58 (1965): 110).

⁴³⁶ See the following passage from the Futurists' manifesto: "We shattered rhythms. Khlebnikov gave status to the poetic meter of the living conversational word. We stopped looking for meters in the textbooks; every motion generates for the poet a new free rhythm." (*A Trap for Judges*, 2, in *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes*, 54).

⁴³⁷ See the passage from the same Futurist manifesto: "We abolished punctuation marks which for the first time brought to the fore the role of the verbal mass and made it perceivable" (*Ibid.*, 54).

⁴³⁸ "Predystoriia."

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

the like, which had been ideologically sacralized since the beginning of the 1930s.⁴⁴⁰ It was a manifestation of his devotion to the legacy of Kruchenykh, whose protests against the ideological top-heaviness of Russian literature acquired a particular relevance in Soviet times.⁴⁴¹ Not coincidentally, Glazkov's ironic play with ideological clichés began in his absurdist poems, written in accordance with Kruchenykh's recipes for the production of *zaum'*.⁴⁴² Similarly, Nekrasov's first attacks on Soviet ideology through the playful subversion of official language also involved *zaum'*, as the poem "Stikhi na iazyke," written in the late 1950s, demonstrated:

бесе́ме велкесе́ме
 ге́пеу э́нкаведе
 э́мгеу ве́капебе
 э́сэпе ка́пеэ́сэс
 цик
 це́ка
 ка́цо
 че́ пе
 це́ у
 цо́б
 цо́бе

 ве́чека
 те́чека
 зе́пете
 ке́гебе

 а́ бе́ ве́ ге́ де́ е́е
 же́зенка́лемене⁴⁴³

Here Nekrasov toys mainly with abbreviations,⁴⁴⁴ the majority of which stand for the

⁴⁴⁰ Nekrasov seemed to be well acquainted with these poems. See his parody on Glazkov, which targets one such text, "Skhema smekha" (1940), with its characteristic refrain: «А может быть, и нет» (But maybe it ain't so; *Izbrannoe*, 40): «Поэт никак не бездарь, / Талантливый поэт. / Идет нарочно трезвый, / А может быть, и нет. // Идет он от подруги, / Пиджак на нем одет, / На нем одеты брюки, / А может быть и нет» (The poet isn't at all talentless, / He's a talented poet. / He walks intentionally sober, / But maybe it ain't so. // He is walking away from his girlfriend's house, / He wears a jacket, / He wears trousers, / But maybe it ain't so; Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Historisches Archiv, F. 105).

⁴⁴¹ See Kruchenykh's article "Chort i rechetvortsy" (1913-1922), in which he enthusiastically promotes «искусство без моралина» (art without preaching). In A. Kruchenykh, *Apocalipsis v russkoi literature*, 18.

⁴⁴² See Glazkov's above-cited poem "Kolos'ia podkosilo koleso" (1939).

⁴⁴³ *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5 (1993): 267. The poem is also known as "Stikhi na nashem iazyke" and "Stikhi na sovetskom iazyke."

most important Soviet political institutions, such as VLKSM (the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League), GPU (Chief Political Directorate), an early incarnation of the KGB, TsK (The Central Committee), KPSS (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), KGB, and some others. Written down as “normal” words (and effectively “made strange” by this operation), the abbreviations in question are interspersed with nonsense words (beseme), Georgian words (katso, tsob tsobe, which allude to Stalin’s ethnicity and heavily accented Russian), military abbreviations (Ts u, che pe⁴⁴⁵), abbreviations used in telegrams (techeka, zepete⁴⁴⁶), and, finally the sound of the letters of the Russian alphabet when they are read out loud. Spliced together, these letters form one big monster-word, with which the poem concludes. Such verbal manipulations ridiculed not the Russian language itself, but the version, which the state imposed. This literary endeavor was extremely risky even in the new, post-Stalinist era, and it could have very unfavorable consequences for the young poet.

Of course, not all of Nekrasov’s early verses were so openly challenging, but most of them sounded very ambiguous. The next poem, for instance, can easily be read as a meditation on the danger of expressing oneself freely within hearing of the omnipresent KGB:

Молчу	(I am silent
Молчи	Be silent
Молчу	I am silent
Молчи	Be silent
Чутьем	Instinctively
Чутьем	Instinctively
Течем	We glide
Течем	We glide
Я думал	I thought
Мы о чем	About what

⁴⁴⁴ Kruchenykh suggested a close affinity between *zaum'* and various Soviet abbreviations in his essay “O zaumnom iazyke v sovremennoi literature” (1924). In *Novoe v pisatel'skoi tekhnike*, Moscow: Izdanie Vserossiiskogo Soiuza Poetov, 1927, 58.

⁴⁴⁵ They stand for «ценное указание» (valuable instructions) and «чрезвычайное происшествие» (emergency event), respectively.

⁴⁴⁶ They stand for «точка» (period) and «запятая» (comma), respectively.

Молчим	We are silent
А мы молчали	But we were silent
Вот о чем ⁴⁴⁷	About this)

In another poem, “Stikhi skorogovorka,” Nekrasov plays with the word «правда» (truth), an important Soviet idcologeme. He places it in various contexts, for the most part dubious ones:

Что правда то правда	(The truth is the truth
Все правда да правда	All the truth all the time
Все правда	Everything is the truth
Да правда	And the truth
Да правда да правда	And the truth and the truth
Взаправду	Truthfully
Про правду	About the truth
Твердят пропаганду	They pound in their propaganda
Да вправду	And truthfully
За правду	For the truth
Заплатят зарплату ⁴⁴⁸	They will pay a wage)

Indeed, only a few of Nekrasov’s early poems looked politically innocuous. Nevertheless, they were strikingly “strange.” Here is a typical example:

Темнота	(Darkness
Темнота	Darkness
Дома	Houses
Тат тата	Tat tata
Дома	Houses
Да	Yes
Дома	Houses
Ах	Oh
Дома	Houses
В лучших домах	In the best homes
Варят	Coffee
Кофе ⁴⁴⁹	Is brewed

⁴⁴⁷ *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5 (1993): 266-267.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

As we see, this poem is ostentatiously lacking in any ideological message, which in the eyes of the authorities might have compensated for its “formalist” qualities: namely, the absence of punctuation, “senseless” repetition, and *zaum*’.

With such a record, Nekrasov was certainly ill-prepared for a “normal” poetic career, but anyway he had probably never even seriously considered it as an option.⁴⁵⁰ On the contrary, he immediately joined the literary underground, submitting his verses to the samizdat journal *Sintaksis*, the first issue of which appeared in 1959. That issue contained five of Nekrasov’s pieces,⁴⁵¹ which appeared (quite symbolically) between Glazkov’s poems and the works of Saggir and Kholin. Nekrasov would soon become closely associated with the latter two when he joined the Lianozovo group. As the poet would later recall, their friendship was intense and intellectually stimulating: “I was Saggir’s apprentice, approximately to the same degree that he was mine. This was a mutual apprenticeship, not only with Saggir, but of course with Kholin as well.”⁴⁵²

Nevertheless, each of the Lianozovo authors displayed a distinctive individuality. For example, Nekrasov showed little interest in the Barrack theme, which had been introduced by Evgenii Kropivnitskii, and which the young Saggir and, especially, Kholin had enthusiastically explored in their poems.⁴⁵³ Instead, Nekrasov continued his poetic

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁵⁰ As Genrikh Saggir recalls: “Our mutual friend, the very lovely Natalia Ivanovna Stoliarova, who worked at that time as a secretary to Iliia Erenburg, tried with all her heart to help us and showed our poems to the master. It was rumored that he had helped to launch Boris Slutskii’s poetic career. But as he was going through Seva Nekrasov’s poems, Iliia Grigor’evich encountered the following epigram: «Русский ты или еврейский? / Я еврейский русский. / Слуцкий ты или советский? / Я советский Слуцкий» (Are you a Russian or a Jew? / I’m a Jewish Russian. / Are you a Slutskii or a Soviet? / I’m a Soviet Slutskii). This was right on target. Everything was finished for us, even before we started. The master was greatly angered by the truth.” (In *Samizdat veka*, 420).

⁴⁵¹ Later Nekrasov expressed disappointment with his choice of poems in *Sintaksis*: “I submitted a poor selection of poems. Alik Rusanov and Alik Ginsburg persuaded me not to take this task too seriously, since thereafter *Sintaksis* was expected to appear on a weekly basis. Only for ‘Kosmicheskoe’ do I take full responsibility.” (In *Samizdat veka*, 420).

⁴⁵² “Stikhi – eto to, chto zapominaetsia,” in Kulakov, *Poeziia kak fakt*, 334.

⁴⁵³ Occasionally, however, Nekrasov also turned to the Barrack theme. Here is one of his early poems: «Барак / Просто барак // 2х этажный барак / 3х этажный барак // Много / Много много много / Многоэтажный барак» (A barrack / Simply a barrack // A two-story barrack / A three-story barrack // Multi / Multi multi multi / Multistoried barrack; *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5 (1993): 266). Interestingly, the Barrack theme is also present in Glazkov’s early poetry. Here is, for example, his piece written in 1943: «А рабочие в бараке / Поругались из-за бабы, / Начались меж ними драки, /

manipulations of official ideologemes. The poems he thus composed would eventually earn him a title of the “father of Russian Conceptualism.”⁴⁵⁴

This poetic trend, which was predicated on the important cultural task of “demystifying evaluative ideological concepts,”⁴⁵⁵ would come to full fruition more than a decade later, but it was Nekrasov who discovered and first implemented its main technique. This involves the subversion of “the all-comprehensive totalitarian Ideology” through the ironic repetition and exaggeration of its signs, according to the formula put forward by the most prominent theoretician of the Conceptualism, Mikhail Epstein.⁴⁵⁶ He wittily compared this technique to Perseus’s defeat of the Medusa Gorgon with the help of his shield: “The novelty was to use a mirror, not a sword, to conquer ideology, bewitching it with its own reflection.”⁴⁵⁷

This tactic is already evident in Nekrasov’s poem “Stikhi” (1959). It is based on the repetition of an official formula, which was used in everyday media reports on the achievements of the Soviet economy. On the radio this formula was customarily articulated with a specific intonation suggestive of confidence and excitement, cleverly alluded to by means of the poem’s layout:

Рост
 Всемирного дальнейшего скорейшего развертывания мероприятий
 По
 Всемирному скорейшему дальнейшему развертыванию мероприятий
 По
 Скорейшему дальнейшему всемирному развертыванию мероприятий
 По
 Дальнейшему скорейшему всемирному развертыванию мероприятий⁴⁵⁸

Молодецкие забавы.» (And the laborers in the barrack / Had a squabble over a broad, / They started fighting with each other, / It was boisterous horseplay; *Samye moi stikhi*, 43).

⁴⁵⁴ Gerald Janeczek, “Teoria i praktika kontseptualizma u Vsevoloda Nekrasova,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 5 (1993): 196.

⁴⁵⁵ Anesa Miller-Pogasar in Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future*, trans. and with Introduction by Anesa Miller-Pogasar, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, 8.

⁴⁵⁶ See Epstein’s reflections on this matter: “The all-comprehensive totalitarian Ideology cannot be defeated by another, better ideology, but by the repetition of its own signs: this was conceptualism’s principal discovery” (*After the Future*, 68).

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁵⁸ *A-IA. Literaturnoe izdanie*. Elancourt: A-IA, 1985, 39.

(The increase in
 The fullest continuing rapid deployment of measures
 For
 The fullest rapid continuing deployment of measures
 For
 The rapid continuing fullest deployment of measures
 For
 The continuing rapid fullest deployment of measures)

By repeating the formula (each time in a slightly changed version) and rearranging it as a grammatically correct, but endless and senseless sentence, Nekrasov mocks not only the official myth of constant economic progress, but also the demagogic nature of Soviet propaganda in general.

Nekrasov targets another Soviet legend, perhaps the most influential one of all, in the poem, "Para slov Lene Sokovu,"⁴⁵⁹ the design of which mimics a children's quiz game:

1	2
Ильич*	Электричество*
*кто открыл электричество	*что придумал Ильич ⁴⁶⁰
(Il'ich*	Electricity*
*who discovered electricity	*discovered by Il'ich)

These lines allude to the propaganda cliché «лампочка Ильича» (the bulb of Il'ich), commonly found in children's stories about Lenin, who "brought" electricity to the most remote corners of Russia. The cliché reflects the popular myth of Lenin's wisdom and omnipotence, which gained new strength in the post-Stalinist era, when Lenin was commonly perceived as the antipode of Stalin. This idea became very popular among the intelligentsia,⁴⁶¹ prompting Nekrasov to turn his attention to it. He mockingly exaggerated the Lenin myth to obviously fantastic proportions (casting "Il'ich" as the

⁴⁵⁹ Leonid Sokov was an unofficial artist and one of the first to begin to work on ideological topics by creating his so-called "ideological objects." About this see Iliia Kabakov, *60-e-70-e. Zapiski o neofitsial'noi zhizni v Moskve*, 74-77.

⁴⁶⁰ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 51.

⁴⁶¹ See, for example, Voznesenskii's numerous poems about Lenin, which are discussed in the previous chapter of this book.

“inventor” of electricity), simultaneously pointing by the poem’s design of a children’s game to the childish naiveté of the latter grown-up fans.⁴⁶²

In the poem below Nekrasov targets the concept of the “people’s enemy,” one of the most sinister creations of Soviet propaganda:

Вот кто	(That’s who’s
виноват-то	responsible
белофинны белофинны	White Finns White Finns
интеллигенты интеллигенты	intellectuals intellectuals
Чемберлены Чемберлены	Chamberlains Chamberlains
разгильдяи разгильдяи	slobs slobs
разговоры разговоры	conversations conversations
бракоделы бракоделы	bunglers bunglers
браконьеры браконьеры	poachers poachers
интервенты интервенты	interventionists interventionists
интуристы интуристы	foreign tourists foreign tourists
виноваты	they are guilty
симулянты	malingers
спекулянты	speculators
контрабандисты	smugglers
формалисты	formalists
менделисты	mendelists
морганисты	morganists
космополиты...	cosmopolitans...
иезуиты иезуиты	Jesuits Jesuits
эфиопы эфиопы	Ethiopians Ethiopians
антиподы антиподы	antipodes antipodes
оппоненты оппоненты	opponents opponents
виноваты	they are guilty
супостаты	scoundrels
виноваты	they are guilty
басурманы	infidels
виноваты	they are guilty
марсиане	Martians
виноваты	they are guilty
масоны ⁴⁶³	masons)

The poet includes in his list not only the “external enemies” of the Bolshevik regime, like Neville Chamberlain and the White Finns of marshal Mannerheim, but also some of its

⁴⁶² Here Nekrasov mocks another official legend as well, that of Russian superiority in every field of science and technology. This legend had been developed alongside the state’s infamous campaign against “cosmopolitans,” but was still very much alive even after Stalin’s death.

⁴⁶³ *A-IA*, 39. For another version of the same poem see *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 55.

countless “internal enemies,” such as “formalists” and “cosmopolitans,” adding, to top it all off, Martians. These words are mixed in the text with the derogatory labels used in Soviet newspapers (antipodes, opponents, foreign tourists), in Russian folklore (Ethiopians, scoundrels, infidels), and in the anti-Semitic Soviet press (which employed the word “masons” as an euphemism for “Jews”).⁴⁶⁴ Such a bizarre mixture creates a comic effect, but certainly one with disturbing overtones. The entire text is designed as an exercise in absurdity, which, through its ingenious use of hyperbole and catalogue verse, unmasks and undercuts the general mechanism of official brainwashing.⁴⁶⁵

As one can see, Nekrasov’s experiments directly anticipated the practices of the Conceptualist poets of the younger generation – Dmitrii Prigov⁴⁶⁶ and Lev Rubinstein. The texts of the latter two poets and Nekrasov first appeared together in the Leningrad samizdat journal *37* at the end of the 1970s, and since then they have often been linked to each other, as proponents of the same trend. Yet Nekrasov’s verse displays many characteristics that make them radically different from the poetic production of Prigov and Rubinstein. Such characteristics include Nekrasov’s strong predilections for paronomasia and minimalist technique, as well as his interest in the visual qualities of the text. These features place Nekrasov’s poems far beyond the realm of Russian

⁴⁶⁴ Since the beginning of the 1970s articles of this kind were regularly published in the literary monthly *Nash sovremennik* and *Molodaia gvardiia*. See also the book by N.N. Iakovlev, *I avgusta 1914* (1974), notorious for its elaboration of the masonic subject.

⁴⁶⁵ It should be noted that a similar attack on the myth of the “people’s enemy” can already be found in Glazkov’s early verses. In the poet’s archive I discovered the following text, addressed to a fellow-poet: «Если я такой новатор, / что не признан всей страной, / в этом немцы виноваты, / а не наш советский строй. // Если ты такой новатор, / что не признан как Глазков, / в этом немцы виноваты, / а не строй твоих стихов» (If I am the kind of innovator / That the whole country ignores, / The Germans are to blame, / Not our Soviet system. // If you are such a pitiful innovator / That the whole country ignores you, / The Germans are to blame, / Not your poetic system.) Interestingly, this poem was written in 1944, when the war with the Nazis was not yet over. In such a context the poet’s ability to distance himself from the pervasive Soviet propaganda seems especially impressive.

⁴⁶⁶ Nekrasov claims that he anticipated not only Prigov’s main techniques, but also his poetic diction. As proof, Nekrasov cites a poem that he wrote at the end of the 1950s: «Сергей Сергеевич, учитель / Купил себе увеличитель / Не потому, что был учитель / А потому, что в лотерею выиграл» (Sergei Sergeevich the teacher / Bought himself a photo enlarger / Not because he was a teacher / But because he won the lottery; *Doiche Buch*, Moscow: Vek XX i Mir, 1998, 88.) Although this poem does indeed closely resemble Prigov’s manner, it hardly proves plagiarism on the part of the younger poet. For Nekrasov this intonation was rather atypical, and Prigov had every right to adopt it as his own.

Conceptualism, at least as it has been defined by its major theoreticians.⁴⁶⁷

Nekrasov's penchant for brevity of expression as well as paronomasia can be also traced to his mentor Glazkov, in whose poetry these features are tightly intertwined.⁴⁶⁸ Word play is especially intense in Glazkov's two- and four-line poems, which, as the poet himself (and some critics) believed, were the most ingenious part of his oeuvre.⁴⁶⁹ Glazkov collected these poems under the title «краткостишня», a neologism which now seems a direct predecessor of the term "Minimalism," a word of much later coinage. It has been suggested that Russian Minimalism was "one kind of reaction to the political commercialization of language, to long, empty speeches, and to the resulting devaluation of the word in Soviet culture,"⁴⁷⁰ similarly, contemporary readers perceived Glazkov's «краткостишня» as a poetic challenge to the high-flown imperial rhetoric of the Soviet state.⁴⁷¹ At the beginning of the 1950s Vsevolod Nekrasov would read Glazkov's "kratkestishia" in a very analogous way, discovering in their brevity new creative opportunities.

Not coincidentally, when in his memoirs Nekrasov analyzes the intense, present-day immediacy of Glazkov's poetry, he provides as an example the following distich:

Евгений Аронч
не гений, а сволочь⁴⁷²
(Evgenii Aronch –
is not a genius, but a scumbag.)

⁴⁶⁷ See Epstein's description of Conceptualist aesthetics: "Conceptualism can boast of few works executed in masterly fashion, in the traditional sense of the word. Its language is impoverished, primitive, pompous; its pictures are underdrawn, any which way, by an artist who was obviously lazy. <...> Rather than a difficult birth of speech laden with amazement, we find rumination and a bolting of words arousing boredom. Everything that is said should be noted, tired of, and tossed aside as quickly as possible; any topic whatever, from the lofty to the low, including love, faith, and life." (*After the Future*, 62-63).

⁴⁶⁸ Gerald Janecek briefly compares Nekrasov's minimalist verses to Glazkov's short poems ("Minimalism in Contemporary Russian Poetry: Vsevolod Nekrasov and Others," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, no. 3 (1992): 417). However, the only purpose of this comparison was to establish the difference between the poets' techniques.

⁴⁶⁹ As Glazkov acknowledged in one of his later poems: «Написал то же я, / Быть может, что и прочие, / Но самое хорошее, / В том, что покороче.» (Maybe I've written the same, / That others have, / But my best [writings] are those / That are shortish; *Izbrannoe*, 481).

⁴⁷⁰ Janecek. "Minimalism in Contemporary Poetry: Vsevolod Nekrasov and Others," 419.

⁴⁷¹ This was precisely the perception of Lili Brik, who praised the fragmented quality of Glazkov's poetry in her letters to the poet. See her above-cited letter of March 24, 1942.

⁴⁷² "Predystoriia."

This obviously served as a prototype for a number of Nekrasov's own poems, for instance, this one:

Нет ты не Гойя

Ты

Другое⁴⁷³

(No, you are not a Goya,

You are

Something different)⁴⁷⁴

This poem is related to Glazkov's not only by its structure, but also by the paronomastic play «Гойя – другое», which corresponds to Glazkov's pun «Евгений – не гений». The same device was very typical of Glazkov: most of his distiches are based on paronomasia, which powerfully adds to their effectiveness.⁴⁷⁵ Not surprisingly, Nekrasov also put this technique to use, making paronomasia the distinctive feature of his own poetry:

верите ли

а ведь вот они

верили

ведь им ведь

велели⁴⁷⁶

(would you believe it

but they

did believe

⁴⁷³ *A-IA*, 45.

⁴⁷⁴ In Russian, actually, the poem is much sharper than one might conclude from the translation. The word «другое» (in this specific construction «Ты – другое») sounds extremely ambiguous. Due to its neutral gender, it looks like an euphemism for a common obscenity, which, like the majority of nouns in this Voznesenskii's poem, also begins with «г» – «говно» (shit).

⁴⁷⁵ «Но авторство – / Новаторство!» (But authorship – / Is innovation!), «Я мог бы это доказать, / Но мне не дали досказать» (I could have proved it, / But was not given an opportunity to tell the whole story), or «То было ему чуждо / И он подумал: чушь то» (It was foreign to him, / And he thought: it was all baloney; *Izbrannoe*, 429, 426, 424, respectively.) Unfortunately, the paronomastic effect completely escapes translation, and this makes the poems look far less interesting than they are in the original Russian.

⁴⁷⁶ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 25.

because they were
told to)

Nekrasov's use of paronomasia is discussed in Gerald Janecek's article, appropriately entitled "Vsevolod Nekrasov, Master Paronymist."⁴⁷⁷ In his search for the poet's predecessors, the scholar names Khlebnikov, since he was the first to introduce this device, later implemented by other authors. However, Janecek's list of those authors does not include one of Khlebnikov's most devoted disciples, Glazkov, whose experiments were undoubtedly the immediate source of inspiration for Nekrasov.

The point, actually, is not only the device itself, but also its function in the poem. In contrast to Khlebnikov, Glazkov often uses paronomasia as a tool of political satire,⁴⁷⁸ and in this respect Nekrasov closely follows his example. The polemical charge in their use of the device is already apparent in the above-quoted epigrams, both of which attack the Soviet literary establishment. Glazkov turns against Evgenii Aronovich Dolmatovskii, a poet known for his mediocrity and conformity; while Nekrasov rises up against the official "avant-gardist" Voznesenskii, whose well-known poem "Goya" he parodies.

Soon Nekrasov moved much further in his experimentation than Glazkov, becoming more consistent in his use of paronomasia. As Gerald Janecek shows in the above-mentioned article, the device often serves as "the dominant organizing principle" in Nekrasov's poems:⁴⁷⁹

Аморальность ненормальность
А моральность не банальность

Вообще
Все неверные
Обязательно нервные

Верные
Тоже нервные
Но они по крайней мере верные

(Amorality is an abnormality,
But morality is not banality.

⁴⁷⁷ *Slavic and East European Journal*, no. 2 (1989): 275-292.

⁴⁷⁸ See, for example, Glazkov's poem of 1940: «Табун / пасем. / Табу / на всем» (We take the horses / Out to pasture. / A taboo / On everything; *Samye moi stikhi*, 22.)

⁴⁷⁹ Janecek, "Vsevolod Nekrasov, Master Paronymist," 282.

In general
 Everyone unfaithful
 Is necessarily nervous

 The faithful
 Are also nervous
 But they at least are faithful)

Simultaneously, Nekrasov surpassed his mentor in terms of verbal austerity, frequently limiting his poetic discourse to fragmented sentences and isolated words:

обождите

 и может быть
 живы ⁴⁸⁰

 (just wait

 and maybe
 still alive)

A similar tendency can be found in the works of Nekrasov's fellow poets, Kholin and Saggir, who also strived for brevity of expression, sometimes of a rather radical kind. It is enough to recall Saggir's poem "Voina budushchego" (from *Golosa*, 1958-62), which consists of two words «взрыв!» (explosion!) and «жив!?!» (survived!?!), separated by rows of dots.⁴⁸¹ One is also reminded of Kholin's early poem, which features the two letters, «М» and «Ж,» which customarily designate men's and women's restrooms in Russia.⁴⁸²

Yet Nekrasov seems to be much more consistent in his experiments with Minimalist technique. He created a number of poems out of single words, such as «однако», «вот», «будет», and even out of a single punctuation sign (a period).⁴⁸³ Nekrasov was probably encouraged by Kruchenykh's and Khlebnikov's article "Slovo kak takovoe" (1913), which stated that "<...> a poem could consist of *a single word*, and merely by skillful variation of that word, all the fullness and expressiveness of the artistic

⁴⁸⁰ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 59.

⁴⁸¹ Saggir, *Sobranie sochinenii v 4 tomakh*, t.1, 39.

⁴⁸² Kholin, *Izbrannoe*, 183.

⁴⁸³ Compare it with Saggir's poetic cycle, "Stikhi iz trekh elementov," in which the poems consist of three punctuation signs: a period, a question mark, and an exclamation mark.

image could be achieved.”⁴⁸⁴ Nekrasov also took into account the poetic practices of Kruchenykh and Kamenskii, as well as their fellow poet Vasilisk Gnedov, who created one word and one-letter poems. However, Nekrasov’s Minimalist texts differed notably from those of his predecessors. As Gerald Janecek shows in his article “Minimalism in Contemporary Russian Poetry: Vsevolod Nekrasov and Others,” in the majority of the poet’s works the graphic elements and layout “play a significant, *signifying* role,” contributing to their originality.⁴⁸⁵

In his article Janecek also considered Nekrasov’s more lengthy works, which are “tightly restricted in the variety of their resources,” and therefore belong to the realm of Minimalism.⁴⁸⁶ Most of these texts employ repetition, a technique that Nekrasov has explored since the early 1960s. But if some of his early works, like the poem “Voda” (1961),⁴⁸⁷ look purely experimental, his later texts produce a different impression. In these poems the device has an important semantic function, as one such piece, “Svoboda est’ svoboda” (1964), demonstrates:

Свобода есть
Свобода есть
Свобода есть
Свобода есть
Свобода есть
Свобода есть
Свобода есть свобода⁴⁸⁸

(Freedom is
Freedom is
Freedom is
Freedom is
Freedom is
Freedom is
Freedom is freedom)

⁴⁸⁴ In *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes*, 55.

⁴⁸⁵ *The Slavonic and East European Review*, no. 3 (1992): 411.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Janecek argues that Nekrasov’s predilection for minimalist technique also manifests itself in a tendency to avoid “formal poetic features such as rhyme, metre, stanzas, and other predictabilities...” (*Ibid.*, 417).

⁴⁸⁷ «вода / вода вода вода / вода вода вода вода / вода вода вода вода / вода вода вода / текла» (water / wæter water water / water water water water / water water water water / water water water / ran; cited in Vsevolod Nekrasov, “Vyrzhaia’s’ po tepereshnemu, khotelos’ lirichekogo konkretizma,” in *Tochka zreniia. Vizual’naia poezia: 90-e gody*, 73).

⁴⁸⁸ *A-IA*, 47.

This poem is cited in Janecek's article, followed by the scholar's interpretation. According to Janecek, the poem "by its monotonous repetitiveness suggests an attempt to convince oneself of the presence of freedom despite evidence to the contrary..."⁴⁸⁹

This explanation, however, contradicts the meaning of the poem's last line: "Freedom is freedom," which would look rather odd in such a context. It seems that the poem should be read differently: as an ongoing argument with the Marxist formula, «Свобода есть осознанная необходимость» (Freedom is necessity apprehended by consciousness), which was an important ideological fixture in the Soviet Union, drummed into every Soviet student's head.⁴⁹⁰ By repeating "Freedom is... Freedom is..," Nekrasov seems to be stubbornly searching for his own definition of the word, which he finally finds: "Freedom is freedom." In its defiant simplicity and even tautology this definition directly opposes the casuistic official formula.

The experiments with repetition link Nekrasov's texts to another poetic trend, Concretism. The poet would later recall:

Not earlier than the 80-s <...> I was amazed when I saw such verses – a rectangle, evenly filled with one word: alles alles alles alles alles, etc. It was Gerhard Rühm, I guess, of the 50s. I was struck because in approximately 1960-62, when, apparently, the same wave was passing over us, over me (not a wave of information – it did not exist, we knew nothing about German or any other Concretists – it was just a wave of the mind) – for two or three years I languished, trying to solve this very problem that appeared from nowhere but for some reason was haunting me: how to find a single word from which one could create poetry, to compose a poem solely by means of repetition <...>⁴⁹¹

Nekrasov's verse shared several other important characteristics with Concrete poetry, such as an emphasis on brevity (although not necessarily taken to the extreme) and attention to the spatial organization of the text. Even Nekrasov's favorite device of paronomasia is fairly common among Western Concrete poets. The importance of bringing together "words which sound alike" because "the fun comes from that" had already been stressed by the founder of Concrete poetry, Öyvind Fahlström, in his

⁴⁸⁹ "Minimalism in Contemporary Russian Poetry: Vsevolod Nekrasov and Others." 412.

⁴⁹⁰ This formula was created by Soviet ideologists on the basis of a rather liberal interpretation of Friedrich Engels' work *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)*, in which the relation between freedom and necessity was discussed.

⁴⁹¹ "Vyrazhais' po-tepereshnemu, khotelos' liricheskogo konkretizma," 72.

“Manifest for konkret poesie,” published in 1953.⁴⁹² Fahlström later enthusiastically employed this device in his own texts, as did other Concrete poets, especially the members of the Noigandres group, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, and Décio Pignatari. See, for example, Haroldo de Campos’ comments on Pignatari’s poem (1957), which was based on a play with the words “hombre,” “hembra” and “hambre”:

Concrete lyricism: a love poem made out of paronomasia. The topology of the words on the page conveys the message – when hombre (man) and hembra (female) are placed together, hambre (hunger), in its figurative meaning (appetite, desire), is removed.⁴⁹³

Still, Nekrasov’s use of paronomasia can be considered unique due to its almost unprecedented consistency. Unfortunately, this very trait, which makes Nekrasov’s poems so impressive in Russian, imposes certain difficulties when they are translated into other languages.

Nekrasov’s affinity with Concrete poetry was first demonstrated by Liesl Ujvary, the translator of Nekrasov and other Lianozovo poets into German, in her preface to their publication in the Austrian avant-garde periodical *Die Pestsäule* (1973).⁴⁹⁴ The same idea was expressed in less complimentary terms in an anthology of Russian poetry (Belgrade, 1977), in which Nekrasov was cursorily mentioned as an imitator of Western Visual and Concrete poetry. This provoked the poet to write his “Explanatory Note” (1978), in an attempt to clarify the situation:

In fact, like most of us, I learned about Concrete poetry only in 1964, from Lev Ginsburg’s article. Of course, I was especially impressed by Gomringer’s “Silence.” By this time, however, I had already written such poems as “Rost,” “Voda,” “Svoboda,” some of which Brousek had even managed to publish in the Czech *Tvar*. And others, Saggir and Sokovnin, had even more radical stuff. <...> Each of us came to Concretism and some other things independently, and, of

⁴⁹² *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, edited and with introduction by Mary Ellen Solt, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, 76.

⁴⁹³ In *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, ed. Emmet Williams, New York: Something Else Press, 1967.

⁴⁹⁴ *Die Pestsäule*, 495-522. Liesl Ujvary was an Austrian scholar of Russian literature, who visited Moscow in the early 1970s. She soon became interested in underground poetry, and especially in the works of the Lianozovo poets, with whom she became personally acquainted. This did not escape the attention of the KGB which promptly expelled her from the country. Still, she managed to retain possession of these poets’ texts, which she translated into German and published abroad, first in *Die Pestsäule*, and two years later in the German bilingual anthology *Freiheit ist Freiheit: inoffizielle Sowjetische Lyric* (1975), the title for which was provided by Nekrasov’s poem.

course, not in imitation of the Germans, but in our own time, motivated by similar reasons...⁴⁹⁵

One of these reasons, Nekrasov says, was his bitter disenchantment with the kind of poetic rhetoric that had been compromised by the official writers of the Soviet era. This disenchantment he shared with the other Lianozovo poets, who have also sometimes been designated "Concretists."⁴⁹⁶ This was certainly akin to the Western Concretism's fundamental conviction "that the old grammatical-syntactical structures are no longer adequate for the advanced process of thought and communication."⁴⁹⁷

In both cases it led to a dramatic contraction of poetic discourse, and in this respect Nekrasov moved much closer to Western Concretism than any other of the Lianozovo poets. He also seemed to be much more interested in the spatial arrangement of the text and the use of space as an element of semantics. This, in turn, directly linked him to the tradition of Concrete poetry and its concern with establishing "linguistic materials in a new relation to space (the page or its equivalent) and / or time (abandoning the old linear measure)."⁴⁹⁸

Although Nekrasov's early experimental works, such as "Voda," closely resembled some "classic" Concrete poems, this resemblance quickly disappeared when the poet learned about the poetic practices of Gomringer's and other Concretists. From that time on, Nekrasov made major efforts to develop his own techniques, which over time became more and more sophisticated.

Strong efforts to establish his texts in "a new relation to time," abandoning "the old linear measure" are evident in the special layout that Nekrasov extensively employs in his poetic practice. This consists of two parallel columns of different but closely related texts, which, as Janecek points out,⁴⁹⁹ allows the poet to achieve the "simultaneity necessary for true polyphony":

⁴⁹⁵ *A-IA*, 48.

⁴⁹⁶ About this see Mikhail Aizenberg, "Tochka soprotivleniia," *Arion*, no. 2 (1995): 101-108; Mikhail Sukhotin, "O dvukh sklonnostiakh napisaniia slov," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 16 (1995): 244-253; Vladislav Kulakov, "Vizual'nost' v sovremennoi poezii: minimalizm i maksimalizm," *ibid.*, 253-254; "Minimalism: strategii i taktika," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 23 (1997): 258-269.

⁴⁹⁷ *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 7.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ Janecek, "Vsevolod Nekrasov, Master Paronymist," 287.

ум разум	вера
слушай знай свое место	ты понимаешь что ты как-то у нас
раз ты все знаешь	тоже
тут ты будешь хорош	ты вера это твоя сфера ⁵⁰⁰
(intelligence reason	faith
listen know your place	you understand that
if you know everything	you are in a way as well
then here you will do just fine	you faith this is your sphere)

The dialogic nature of the two columns becomes obvious from their respective first lines (reason / faith), and this encourages the reader to go back and forth between the parallel texts, grasping the poem's meaning in the process.

This layout seems to be ideally suitable for pointing to the duality of things and issues, as well as expressing mood swings, and Nekrasov widely uses it for these purposes. On some occasions, however, the parallel layout performs a different function, as may be seen in the following text:

это один Бог знает	а это знает один Бог знает кто
как это бывает	как это было
что это нас так убивает	кто это его так убил

⁵⁰⁰ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 76.

спроси Бога это да тайна	спроси Костю Богатырева покойного и это тайна да но это не та тайна ⁵⁰¹
(this God only knows how it happens	and this knows only God knows who how this happened
what is it that kills us the way it does ask God yes this is a mystery	who killed him the way it was done ask the late Kostia Bogatyrev yes it is a mystery but not that kind of mystery)

In the poem's left column the poet reflects about the human fate in general and its eternal mystery, while in the right one he meditates about a particular fate, that of his friend Konstantin Bogatyrev, who was brutally murdered, most likely by KGB agents, in 1976.⁵⁰² The tragic disparity between "this" and "that" ending of one's life looks especially stark due to the columns' parallel layout, emphasized further by their almost identical vocabulary, which, however, produces different meanings in each case.⁵⁰³

The spacing between words and lines, in turn, is a crucial element in Nekrasov's works. In most of the poet's texts it does not follow standard practice, and it can vary considerably even within a single poem, conveying important nuances of intonation and meaning.⁵⁰⁴ In the following piece the lyrical message is delivered almost entirely by means of line spacing. Some of these spacings are double, some of them single:

и вообще
а вообще-то

одна душа
одной душе

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁰² On Kostantin Bogatyrev see the footnote 301.

⁵⁰³ The parallel lines «спроси Бога» and «спроси Костю Богатырева покойного» deserve special attention. In such close proximity to each other, the word «Бог» echoes the very same combination of sounds in the late friend's last name Богатырев, which is not necessary evident even to Russian ears.

⁵⁰⁴ In some of Genrikh Saggir's poems the spacing is also not standard. About this see his interview, "Risovat' nado umet'," *Voprosy literatury*, July-August (1999): 147-148.

ни больше
ни меньше ⁵⁰⁵

(and on the whole
and generally speaking
one soul
to another soul
neither more
nor less)

Another device which allows Nekrasov to abandon “the old linear measure” is the insertion of footnotes into the text of his poems. Although experiments of this kind had already been carried out by David Burluk,⁵⁰⁶ Nekrasov was apparently the first to use the device consistently. And yet it never becomes monotonous, since in each of his texts the footnote carries out a different stylistic task. This can be seen in the above-cited poems, “Moi papa i mama...” and “Para slov Lene Sokovu.” In the first of these, the inserted footnote helps Nekrasov avoid excessive sentimentality in his childhood recollections, and in the second, it allows him imitate the design of a children’s quiz game, which makes the poem especially effective. The same device, however, performs a different function in the poem below, where it infuses a dose of skepticism into a text that would otherwise be unusually cheerful for this poet:

Еще бы
И чего
Надо еще
Есть
Питер
И* в Питере
Есть
Чего есть и пить ⁵⁰⁷

*Еще

⁵⁰⁵ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 27.

⁵⁰⁶ See I.R. Dering-Smirnova, I.P. Smirnov, “Istoricheskii avangard i evolutsiia sistem,” *Russian Literature*, no. 8 (1980): 407-408.

⁵⁰⁷ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 12.

(You bet
 What else
 Does one need
 There is
 St. Pete's
 And* in St. Pete's
 There is
 Plenty to eat and drink
 * So far)

In Nekrasov's poems, as Janecek remarks in his article, "the play with footnotes can be increased by increasing their number and by embedding footnotes within footnotes,"⁵⁰⁸ but the poet rarely succeeds when he piles them up. In most cases this leads to excessive textual intricacy, which, paradoxically, makes the poem seem more trivial.

An abundance of asterisks, footnotes, different typefaces, as well as nonstandard spacing powerfully contributes to the visual effect of Nekrasov's poems. He also makes wide use of parentheses, underlinings, crossings out, etc. All these elements carry an essential semantic charge, as can be seen in the following poem:

жить
 как причина
 жить
 как причина
уважительная
неуважительная
 (нужное)
 (ненужное)
 (зачеркнуть)
 (подчеркнуть)⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ "Vsevolod Nekrasov, Master Paronymist," 287. Janecek also shows that in some instances "the footnotes start even before the body of the text does," but such pieces are purely experimental and are not typical of the poet.

⁵⁰⁹ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 86.

(to live
 as a reason
 to live
 as a reason
~~sufficient~~
~~insufficient~~
 (correct)
 (incorrect)
 (cross out)
 (underline)

The last four lines imitate the typical instructions for filling out Soviet questionnaires, which the poet interprets in a broad, existential sense, and therefore, as the reader eventually understands, is unable to comply with. When confronted with a given binary choice, i.e., sufficient / insufficient (these adjective are important terms in the bureaucrat lexicon), Nekrasov underlines and crosses out both variants, demonstrating by this visual gesture his complete rejection of official Soviet standards.

Strong involvement with the political situation is a characteristic trait of Nekrasov in particular, and of Russian Concretism in general. In this respect it may be compared to Brazilian Concrete poetry with its sound sociological-political orientation.⁵¹⁰ Similar interests are not foreign to Czech Concrete poetry, and are quite pronounced in the works of Bohumila Grogerova and Josef Hirsal, and (to a lesser extent) Ladislav Novák.⁵¹¹ Yet Nekrasov certainly surpassed both the Western Concretists and his own compatriots in his profound commitment to political dissent. Political commentary is present not only in those poems, in which Nekrasov allows himself to play his risky games with ideologemes, but also in many other pieces, which, at least at first glance, may seem “neutral.” This quality can create certain confusion in the reception of some of Nekrasov’s texts, such as the poem “Eto ia...”:

⁵¹⁰ See, for example, Augusto de Campos poem “sem un umero,” in *Concrete poetry: A World View*, 95.

⁵¹¹ See the poem by Bohumila Grogerova and Josef Hirsal, in which the Czech word “svoboda” (freedom) is transformed through complex linguistic manipulations into the English word “freedom” (*An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, 142). See also Ladislav Novák’s poem “Individualista” (*Concrete poetry: A World View*, 139).

Это я
 Это я
 Это я

А где моя
 Где моя
 Где моя
 Моя
 Моя
 Моя
 Моя
 Моя
 Яма⁵¹²

(It is I
 It is I
 It is I

And where is my
 Where is my
 Where is my
 My
 My
 My
 My
 My
 Pit)

This poem was cited in Janecek's article "Minimalism in Contemporary Russian Poetry: Vsevolod Nekrasov and Others," where it was apparently interpreted as a general, existential statement.⁵¹³ The scholar translated the poem's last and most important word «яма» as "hole," which in English generally does not convey any ominous meaning.⁵¹⁴ On the contrary, the Russian word «яма» has many sinister connotations: it can mean "pit," "prison cell," "grave," or even "mass grave,"⁵¹⁵ all of which are powerfully adumbrated by the poem's layout. Despite the poem's decidedly casual, matter-of-fact

⁵¹² *A-IA*, 44.

⁵¹³ "Minimalism in Contemporary Russian Poetry: Vsevolod Nekrasov and Others," 413.

⁵¹⁴ The word "hole" can mean in American slang "punishment cell," but this meaning is very rare (many thesauruses do not mention it at all), and the reader definitely needs some further elaboration in order to interpret it this way.

⁵¹⁵ See *Tolkovy slovar' russkogo iazyka*, ed. B.M. Volin and D.N. Ushakov, Moscow: Terra, 1996, t. 4, 1462.

beginning, “This is I...,” tension is quickly established and grows with the repetition of the question, “Where is my...,” suggestive of strong anxiety. This anxiety is explained only at the end of the poem, when the word «яма» suddenly appears (it is a phonetic anagram of the word «моя»), transporting the reader to a specific place and time (Soviet Russia), with its recent history of terror and death.

Although this poem can be read as a reflection on every Soviet citizen’s potential fate, most likely, Nekrasov is talking about himself and his own perspective. The text probably alludes to Mandelstam’s well-known poem, “Eto kakaiia ulitsa...” (1935), where the word «яма» also plays an important role:

...Мало в нем было линейного,
 Права он не был лилейного,
 И потому эта улица
 Или, верней, эта яма
 Так и зовется по имени
 Этого Мандельштама...⁵¹⁶

(He didn’t keep to the straight and narrow,
 His temper resembled no lily,
 And that’s why this street
 Or rather, this pit
 Was given the name
 Of that Mandelstam...)

Mandelstam’s subsequent imprisonment, his death and burial in a mass grave («яма») in a labor camp, force us to read this poem in a new way and to perceive it as a kind of tragic prophecy. The “pit” appeared to be the most likely destination for any writer who dared to oppose the Soviet regime. Nekrasov, who constantly invokes Mandelstam in his poetry,⁵¹⁷ obviously considered the possibility of a similarly dreadful fate for himself.

⁵¹⁶ Osip Mandelstam, *Sochineniia v 2 tomakh*, Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990, t. 1, 213.

⁵¹⁷ See, for instance, the poem in which Nekrasov discusses the fate of the Russian poets, that of Pushkin, Lermontov, Blok, Maiakovskii, and, finally, Mandelstam: «Ничего / Александр Сергеевич // Ничего / Михаил Юрьевич // Ничего / Александр Александрович // Ничего Владимир Владимирович // Ничего / что Осип Эмильевич / ничего / ?» (It’s nothing / Aleksandr Sergeevich // It’s nothing / Mikhail Iurievich // It’s nothing / Aleksandr Aleksandrovich // It’s nothing Vladimir Vladimirovich // Is it nothing / that Osip Emilievich // is nothing / ?; *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 34). All the poets Nekrasov enumerates here died prematurely and tragically, but Mandelstam is singled out – because his was the most terrifying and horrible fate.

It could not be ruled out even in the post-Stalinist, but still Soviet, era.⁵¹⁸

Intertextuality is an impressive feature of Nekrasov's Concretism. Games with quotations are extremely typical of the poet, and his great talent for retrieving and refurbishing the familiar distinguishes him from the Western practitioners of Concrete poetry. This abundance of allusions give Nekrasov's texts added depth and complexity, but, of course, it also makes the reader's job significantly harder, especially if he does not share the poet's cultural background.

The effect of Nekrasov's poetry often depends on the reader's familiarity with the standard corpus of literary works taught in Soviet high schools. This can be illustrated by the poet's ingenious play with quotations in the poem "Iz Pushkina":

Товарищ, верь –
Взойдет она

Товарищ прав⁵¹⁹

(Comrade, believe –
it will rise ...

The Comrade is right...)

The first two lines are a quotation from Pushkin's early poem "Chaadaevu" (1818) in which he expresses a hope that "the star of joy" will rise when the tsarist autocracy falls. The third line, however, recalls the official Soviet formula of approval, used in particular at Communist party meetings, whenever a speaker wanted to express agreement with the preceding orator. The two discourses in question are separated in time by at least a century, but the poet arranges them so that they form a direct dialogue. This allows Nekrasov to show the reader the close relationship between the liberal ideas of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia (which sounded especially beautiful when rendered into verse by the nation's greatest poet, Pushkin) and the horrible realities of twentieth century Russian history – a connection any native reader could probably make instantly.

⁵¹⁸ Although nobody was imprisoned among the Lianozovo group members, all of them lived in constant fear of repression. See Oskar Rabin's recollections "Glavy iz knigi vospominanii 'Tri zhizni' " in *Lianozovskaia gruppā: istoki i sud'by*, Moscow: ZAO Rasters, 6-10.

⁵¹⁹ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 505.

Nekrasov approaches another complex and sensitive issue, Russia's position vis-à-vis the West, in the poem below. Here he again uses a famous quotation as his starting point:

Нас тьмы
и тьмы и тьмы
и тьмы и тьмы и тьмы
и тьмы и тьмы и тьмы и тьмы
и тьмы и тьмы и тьмы и тьмы⁵²⁰

The poem's first two lines «Нас тьмы / и тьмы и тьмы» (There are multitudes / and multitudes and multitudes of us) are a quotation from Alexandr Blok's poem "Skify" (1918). This poem emphasizes Russia's barbarian and "Asiatic" side, which, in the opinion of Blok and other famous Symbolists, made it much stronger than Western civilization, which would inevitably be defeated. This idea of Russia's superiority to the West, which acquired additional overtones in Soviet times, is mocked by Nekrasov, who turns the quotation's key word «ТЬМЫ» (multitudes) into its anagram «МЫТЬ», meaning, in English, "to wash." In this way the poet travesties Russia's allegedly creative barbarism, celebrated by the Symbolists. In Nekrasov's opinion, it merely calls for some urgent sanitary measures.

Despite the succinctness of his poetic discourse, Nekrasov demonstrates a remarkable thematical variety, effectively dealing with political, lyrical, and philosophical topics. And his poetic intonation is also amazingly rich. As one scholar put it, "its lightest, almost non-verbal overtones are able to express everything – from extreme anger to soft, enchanting irony."⁵²¹ Not surprisingly, Nekrasov's poetic experience was vitally important not only for those poets who would later work in the Concretist, Minimalist, or Conceptualist manner,⁵²² but also for those who did not consider themselves to be the direct progenitors of these or any other avant-garde trends, and wrote in a more traditional fashion. Mikhail Aizenberg, one such poet, confesses:

⁵²⁰ *Stikhi iz zhurnala*, 55. The text is based on an anagram and cannot be translated.

⁵²¹ Mikhail Aizenberg, "Vtoroe dykhanie," *Oktiabr'*, no. 11 (1990): 204.

⁵²² See, for example, the poem by Ivan Akhmet'ev, one of the most talented of Nekrasov's direct disciples: «у Некрасова / любое слово / зазвучит / какое он захочет» (Nekrasov / can take any word / he wants / and make it sound; *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 32 (1997): 295).

For me, the most efficacious part of the revision of my poetic experience proved to be Concrete and even Conceptualist practice. All of a sudden I realized anew what poetry is all about, what poems are made of: they are created from nothing: from an exclamation, from an interjection, from a slip of the tongue... I finally realized that poetry is air that has a definite shape, that poetry lives unnoticed in our everyday speech and that it should not under any circumstances be confined to any enclosed cultural cell. It is not a sum of certain traits, but a special state of the spoken language in its own right. As in Nekrasov's poem:

Little twig
 What's wrong with you
 What's wrong with you little twigs
 Ah
 You need some water⁵²³

Like the other unofficial poets who started their careers after Stalin's death, Nekrasov spent almost thirty years in the literary underground, confined mostly to samizdat publications (some of his hand-made books were illustrated by Evgenii Kropivnitskii), although occasionally he was able to publish abroad.⁵²⁴ From time to time his poems appeared in various émigré periodicals; some of them were published in translation in Western literary journals and anthologies, such as *Freiheit ist Freiheit* (1975), and *Kulturpalast* (1984).⁵²⁵

Nekrasov's international reputation got a significant boost when his poetry was discovered by Gerald Janecek, whose comprehensive articles on the poet introduced him to an American audience. Due to Janecek's efforts Nekrasov's first poetic collection, *100 stikhotvoreniï*, was published in the United States in 1987. Two years later Nekrasov's poems began to see print in his home country, starting with the literary monthly *Druzba narodov* (no. 8, 1989). Also in 1989 his collection, *Stikhi iz zhurnalâ*, was published in Russia in book form. Most of the poems in it had been written more than two decades earlier and had appeared in the samizdat journal 37 in 1978-79.

Stikhi iz zhurnalâ, as well as the earlier publications in periodicals, prompted the

⁵²³ «Веточка / Ты чего / Чего вы веточки это // А / Водички» ("Otpustit' slova na voliu," in Kulakov, *Poezia kak fakt*, 389.)

⁵²⁴ Nekrasov earned his living mainly by writing children's poetry. See *Narochno i nechaianno* (1970), *Mezhdû letom i zimoi*, (1976), *Skazki bez priskazki* (1981) and others.

⁵²⁵ *Kulturpalast: Neue Moskauer Poesie and Aktionskunst*. Hrsg. von Günter Hirt und Sasha Wonders. Vuppertall: S-Press, 1984. Günter Hirt and Sasha Wonders were pseudonyms of the German Slavists George Vitte and Sabina Hensgen, who did much to popularize Nekrasov's poetry in the West.

appearance of extremely favorable critical responses, such as Mikhail Aizenberg's "Vtoroe dykhanie" (*Oktiabr'*, no.11, 1990). Nekrasov's poetry was extensively discussed in Vladislav Kulakov's review "Zametki o neizdannom" (*Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 8, 1988), as well as in his article devoted to the Lianozovo group, published in *Voprosy literatury* (no. 3, 1991). All these reviews and articles identified Nekrasov as one of the most important poets of the modern Russian avant-garde. However, Nekrasov's direct influence on the poets of the younger generation, above all the "Moscow Conceptualists," had not been clearly articulated at that time. This inevitably led to some confusion, for which Nekrasov was inclined to blame two major theorists of the modern Russian avant-garde, Boris Grois and Mikhail Epstein, who had written on the "Moscow Conceptualists," but did not stress Nekrasov's pioneering role.⁵²⁶

Nekrasov began his polemic with Grois and Epstein in his article "Kak eto bylo (i est') s kontseptualismom," published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 1, 1990. Despite its general vagueness, this article can be considered an important contribution to the problem, since it helped to restore a proper literary perspective.⁵²⁷ This article was rather reserved in tone, in contrast to Nekrasov's subsequent essays that dealt with the same topic. The poet's growing aggressiveness made his opponents reluctant to continue the debate, but this did not stop Nekrasov from conducting a one-sided argument. His next collection *Spravka* (1991), which contained verses written in the previous three decades,

⁵²⁶ Indeed, in Boris Grois' article "Moscovskii romanticheskii kontseptualizm," published in *A-IA* (Paris, 1979), Nekrasov was not even mentioned. In Epstein's essay, "Kontsepty, metaboly... O novykh techeniakh v poezii" (*Oktiabr'*, no. 4, 1988), Nekrasov's poetry was briefly analyzed along with Prigov's and Rubinstein's texts, but no indication was given that he had pioneered the techniques in question. Here is how Mikhail Epstein explained what had happened: "In 1985 or 1986, when I was working on my article on Conceptualist and Metarealist trends in Russian poetry, I asked several poets to send me their verses none of which were available in print at that time. Dmitrii Prigov and Lev Rubinstein kindly passed to me some of their works. When I called to Nekrasov with the same request, he declined to do so. He said that in a normal society critics find the works of poetry already published and do not bother poets with such requests. Well, I had to agree that our society was abnormal; but for a literary critic like myself to write about unpublished poets was precisely a chance to normalize it, in my own modest way. My article on Conceptualism and Metarealism was published in 1988 in the Moscow journal *Oktiabr'* (no. 4, 194-203). It included sections on Prigov and Rubinstein, and only brief mention about Nekrasov. This was dictated by his own choice: I had no materials to judge about his creative accomplishments. If I remember correctly, Prigov's and Rubinstein's texts and fragments cited in my article happened to be their first publications in Soviet press." (Personal communication, May 8, 2001).

⁵²⁷ Grois argued with this article in his "O pol'ze teorii dlia praktiki" (*Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 44, 1990); for further discussion of the subject see Kulakov, "O pol'ze praktiki dlia teorii" (*Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 52, 1990).

also featured some of these newly written articles.

Polemical writings occupied even more significant place in Nekrasov's subsequent book, *Paket* (1996),⁵²⁸ leaving little room for the poems themselves. The legalization of unofficial art had brought Nekrasov not only feelings of relief, but also of strong disappointment, since he found himself overshadowed by younger poets – Prigov, Rubinstein, and Kibirov. Unlike the rest of Lianozovo poets or Gennadii Aigi, all of whom viewed the newcomers' success philosophically, Nekrasov lost his cool. He began to attack the younger poets for their popularity, while continuing to bear a grudge against Grois and Epstein. Although their essays had been already thoroughly discussed by Janecek, Aizenberg, and Kulakov, all of whom pointed to Nekrasov's ground-breaking efforts, the poet refused to leave the subject to the critics. He returned to this matter again and again, in prose and verse, each time becoming more aggressive and even vicious in his attacks.

Of course, this kind of violent polemicizing may be easily placed within the Futurist tradition, next to the Futurists' manifestoes and treatises, which were full of provocative and outrageous attacks against their literary opponents.⁵²⁹ But if the Futurists' notorious escapades only boosted their artistic energy, Nekrasov's aggressiveness seemed to rob him of his creative powers. In the past decade he had been far less productive in terms of poetry than during the years he spent in the literary underground. And the problem is not only one of quantity, but of quality as well. All the most interesting features of Nekrasov's poetry – the variety of subjects, subtlety, wit,

⁵²⁸ Anna Zhuravleva, Vsevolod Nekrasov. *Paket*, Moscow: Meridian, 1996. The book contained several articles written in collaboration with Nekrasov's wife, Anna Zhuravleva, as well as her own essays on nineteenth-century Russian literature.

⁵²⁹ See, for example, the passage from "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste": "<...> Wash your hands which have touched the filthy slime of the books written by those countless Leonid Andreevs. All those Maksim Gorkys, Kuprins, Bloks, Sologubs, Remizovs, Averchenkos, Chomys, Kuzmins, Bunins, etc. need only a dacha on the river. Such is the reward fate gives tailors. From the heights of skyscrapers we gaze at their insignificance!.."; or the passage from "Go to Hell" (1914): "<...> And along them crept out that gang of Adams with neatly parted hair – Gumilev, S. Makovskii, S. Gorodetskii, Piast – who at first tried to stick the label of Acmeism and Apollonism on their dull songs about Tula samovars and toy lions, and then started a motley round dance around the by-now-established Futurists..." (in *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes*, 51, 86, respectively).

which used to fascinate scholars and his fellow poets,⁵³⁰ – gradually disappeared from his verse. This was already obvious in *Paket*, which contained some of Nekrasov's new poems, but his collection *Doiche Bukh* (1998) represented a further decline from his previously high standards. The title of the collection refers to the poet's recent impressions of Germany, where Nekrasov has traveled on several occasions to participate in various poetry festivals. But, as the reader finds out, these trips were spoiled for Nekrasov by the presence of these very same personages – Prigov, Grois, and their numerous "accomplices." The centerpiece of the collection, "Azart Nikhtzain-Arta," is a prose chronicle of the alleged insults suffered by the poet at the hands of different people at different times, but mostly in recent years. *Doiche Bukh* features relatively few poems, and practically all of them are also devoted to the topic in question, which certainly leaves the reader disappointed.

Only one poem in this collection calls to mind the real Nekrasov, the Nekrasov of his poetic prime, and we will cite it here:

ВОТ КАК ТУТ БЫТЬ
 ВОТ КАК БЫТЬ
 ВОТ
 КАК БЫ
 ТЕБЕ СКАЗАТЬ

НЕ КАК
 БЫТЬ ИЛИ НЕ БЫТЬ

КАК БЫ НЕТ

А КАК
 БЫТЬ КАК ЛЮДИ⁵³¹

(so what is to be done
 so what to do
 so
 don't know how
 to tell you

⁵³⁰ See Aleksandr Ochertianskii's poem dedicated to Vsevolod Nekrasov: «он настолько разный / что: / противно / интересно / и т. д.» (he's so variable / that: / it's repulsive / it's interesting / and so on; *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 23 (1997): 318).

⁵³¹ *Doiche Bukh*, 158.

not like
to be or not to be

it's like not to

but
to be like everyone else)

Indeed, Vsevolod Nekrasov was never able “to be like everyone else.” His rebelliousness and independence had once been sources of poetic strength and creativity. Forty years ago they had led the poet into the literary underground, where he had managed to accomplish almost everything he could have hoped to achieve. These accomplishments secured Nekrasov an important position in Russian poetry, a position that nobody can now question or destroy – not even the poet himself.

CONCLUSION

Despite the Soviet authorities' notorious intolerance of experimental art and their constant persecution of its exponents beginning in the late 1920s, the avant-garde tradition never disappeared from Russian poetry completely. The samizdat poetry of Nikolai Glazkov, written at the end of the 1930s and in the 1940s, became a kind of bridge between the first and the second wave of the Russian avant-garde, which began to emerge in the mid-1950s as a direct result of the general liberalization of the regime. Still, the official attitude towards experimental art remained hostile, and most of the avant-garde authors of the Thaw generation had to work in the literary underground. Only a few poets of this aesthetic orientation managed to become accepted members of the Soviet literary establishment, and then only at the cost of major artistic compromises.⁵³² As we have seen, this was the case with Andrei Voznesenskii, whose contribution to the avant-garde tradition turned out to be very modest.⁵³³ In this respect he was even more of a victim of the Soviet regime than the underground poets, who labored under the constant fear of being persecuted for their samizdat activities and endured numerous other hardships in their everyday struggle for survival.⁵³⁴ These poets, however, refused to submit to the state's aesthetic demands, remaining faithful to their calling. Their courage and persistence were at least partially rewarded in the post-communist era, and many of

⁵³² For more than three decades official and unofficial avant-garde poetry co-existed without any interaction. An opportunity to fuse the two movements arose at the beginning of *perestroika*, but the underground poets were not particularly enthusiastic about it. Most of them regarded Voznesenskii and the other "official" avant-gardists with ironic disdain, if not with open contempt. The only exception was probably Aigi, who allowed Voznesenskii to write a foreword to his poems in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, February 28, 1990.

⁵³³ One should not underestimate the fact that Voznesenskii's most serious potential rivals were out of the competition for almost thirty years. Of course, this situation disoriented not only the readers, who thus had a distorted impression of contemporary Russian poetry, but also Voznesenskii himself, who at a certain point in his career drastically lowered his standards.

⁵³⁴ See, for example, Ilia Kabakov's later recollections: "A feeling of constant dread hanged over all unofficial art, like a sword of Damocles, and one felt it, one was waiting for it to fall, like an inevitable punishment for everything accomplished; the whole life of an unofficial artist was spent under an investigative supervision of sorts that saw everything, and the sword was about to fall right at this last moment, because the distance between one's life and death is very short; and all the conversations – those who lived in that period, the 1970s and 1980s, they remember this – all conversations revolved around stories of who had been arrested, what had been taken away without a warrant, who had been subpoenaed, who had been searched, what had been confiscated, who could be indicted at any moment" (*60-e – 70-e... Zapiski o neofitsial'noi zhizni v Moskve*, 206-207).

the unofficial avant-garde authors of the Thaw generation have since been recognized as being among the most influential contemporary poets. In his article “Zolotoi vek samizdata” Victor Krivulin writes:

Creatively using the discoveries of the Moscow Futurists, Genrikh Sapgir, Igor Kholin, and Vsevolod Nekrasov, as well as Gennadi Aigi, effectively carried out in the late 1950s to early 60s a revolutionary transformation of the poetic language, enriching it with the integral flow of live discourse, activating the elements of play, loosening rigid syntax, and, most importantly, widening the range of poetic devices by the inclusion of visual elements. This direction of poetic development turned out to be remarkably fruitful.⁵³⁵

The aforementioned poets were the immediate precursors of the most interesting trends in the contemporary Russian avant-garde: Conceptualism, Minimalism, and Concrete poetry, which would later be explored by Dmitrii Prigov and Lev Rubinstein, Sergei Sigei and Ry Nikonova, Sergei Biriukov and Ivan Akhmetiev, and others.⁵³⁶

Although the influence of the Lianozovo poets as well as of Gennadii Aigi turned out to be the most profound and enduring, the impact of the Chertkov group was also important for the further development of the experimental tradition. In particular, the works of Valentin Khromov did much to inspire the development of the tradition of palindromic poetry, which became popular among poets, such as Vladimir Gershuni, Dmitrii Aveliani, and Vladimir Pal’chikov, all of whom managed to achieve significant results in this genre.⁵³⁷ Equally impressive was the contribution of another member of the Chertkov group, Stanislav Krasovitskii, despite the fact that the period of his poetic activity lasted for only five years (1955-1960). In his preface to Krasovitskii’s poems in

⁵³⁵ *Samizdat veka*, 347.

⁵³⁶ Even the members of the group “SMOG,” which emerged in the mid-1960s, and whose practices were somewhat similar to those of the official poets of the Thaw generation, could not escape the influence of the Lianozovo poets. In particular, as Kulakov noted, Vladimir Velichanskii’s “early poetic sketches are written in a primitive, intentionally corny style, very similar to that of the Lianozovo Concretists”: «Николай, убравши сено, / загулял и запил сильно, / на слободке мотоцикл / залетел вчера в кювет. / У запруды – два солдата / с третьей девушкой в косынке / нарушают указания» (Nikolai, after gathering the hay, / Began carousing and went on a binge, / In the village a motorcycle / Ended up in a ditch yesterday. / There are two soldiers by the dam / With a girl in a kerchief / Violating regulations). See Kulakov, “SMOG: vzgliad iz 1996 goda.” In *Poeziia kak fakt*, 287-288.

⁵³⁷ About this see Biriukov, *Zevgma*, 110.

The Blue Lagoon Anthology, Kuzminsky states: "Brodsky and Eremin, Khvostenko and Volokhonskii, many Moscow poets are indebted to Krasovitskii..."⁵³⁸

The impact of the Leningrad Neofuturists on later generations of poets also deserves to be mentioned here. It is well known that Brodsky identified Ufliand as one of his mentors who had taught him the "easy handling of everyday discourse and the art of rhyme."⁵³⁹ Aleksandr Kondratov's works, some scholars believe, largely anticipated Prigov's poetic practices.⁵⁴⁰ In addition, the group's activities turned out to be very appealing to the younger students at Leningrad University, who formed another unofficial Neofuturist group at the beginning of the 1960s, this time in the Biology Department. Konstantin Kuzminsky, who would later play a key role in the organization of the literary underground, was a member of this group.⁵⁴¹

As one can see, the avant-garde authors of the Thaw generation made a crucial contribution to the development of Russian experimental poetry. Thanks to their efforts it has gained significant strength in recent years, finally overcoming the consequences of decades of official suppression. Russian avant-garde poets now confidently enter the international arena, from which they were excluded for more than half of a century.⁵⁴²

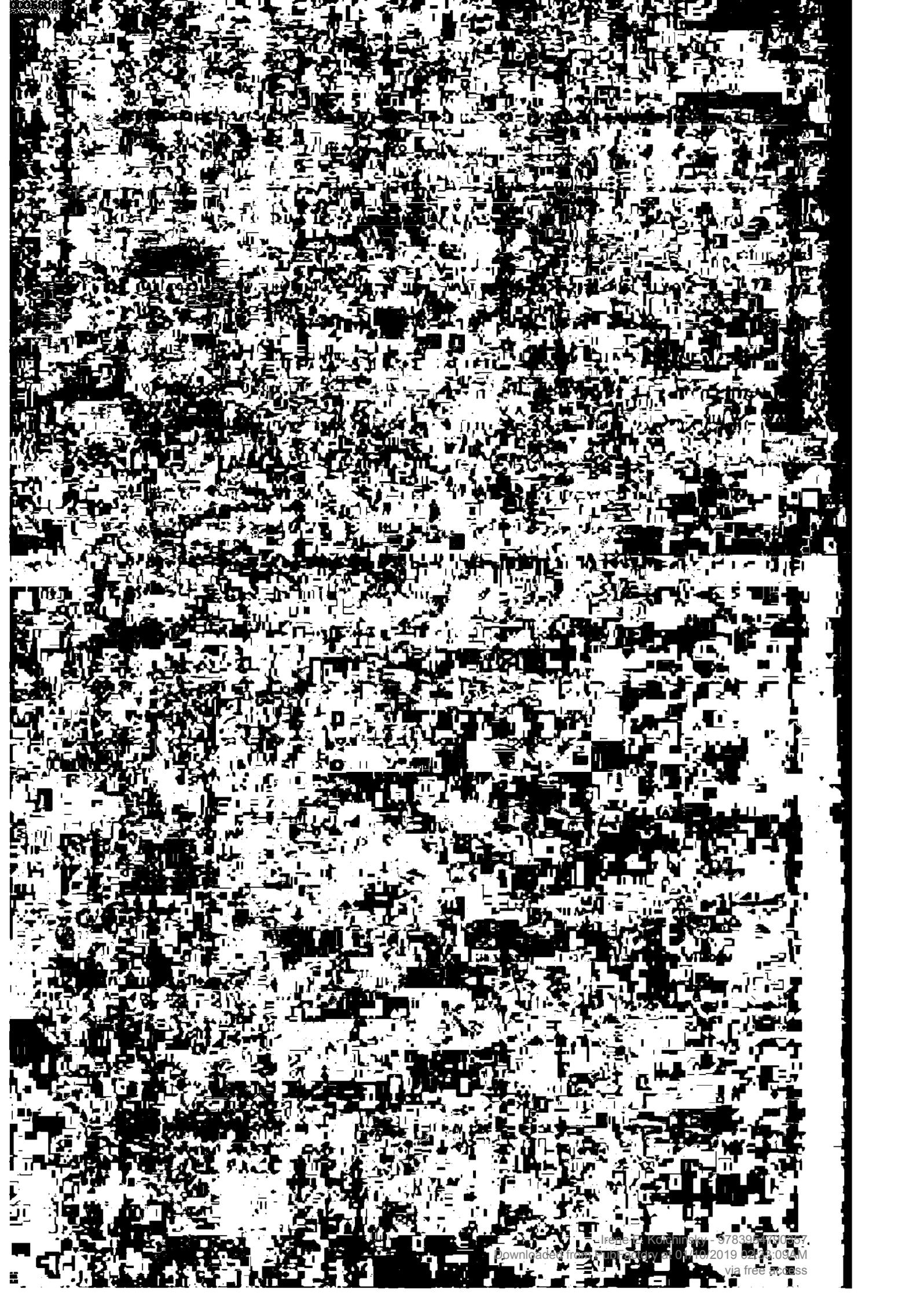
⁵³⁸ *The Blue Lagoon Anthology*, 43.

⁵³⁹ Losev, "Tulupy my," 214.

⁵⁴⁰ See Krivulin, "Zolotoi vek samizdata," in *Samizdat veka*, 349.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.* Around the same time an unofficial group with a similar orientation (its members called themselves Anarcho-Futurists), organized by Sergei Sigei, emerged in Vologda. In 1964 a radical avant-garde group, "Uktuskaia shkola," sprang up in Sverdlovsk; it was organized by Ry Nikonova-Tarshis. See Ry Nikonova-Tarshis, "Uktuskaia shkola," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 16 (1995): 221-238.

⁵⁴² See, for example, the book *Tochka zreniia. Vizual'naia poeziia: 90-e gody*, which includes the works of many of the authors of the Thaw and later generations. In a review of this book, Gerald Janeczek describes it as "maybe the largest and most inclusive compendium of visual poetry in any language to date," and concludes that "this volume is a major achievement in avant-garde studies, and [that] Bulatov has placed Russia in the forefront of the visual poetry field" (*Slavic and East European Journal*, no. 1 (2000): 113-114).



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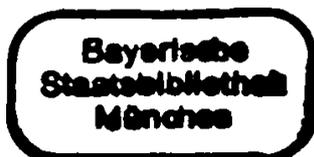
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