

Introduction

This collection of essays is dedicated to Barry Scherr by his admiring colleagues, many of them former students. It assembles research on a broad array of topics, including Russian poetry, prose, and film. Scherr has produced significant scholarship in all of these areas, but more importantly, that work has influenced and inspired his colleagues to further exploration. Functioning like a rhizome, Scherr's immense and varied research has sustained a generation of Slavists and helped to produce a new one.

In context, the phrase quoted in the volume title is somewhat bleak. Analyzing scenes cut from Sergei Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky*, Barry Scherr laments that the intact film might have shown ways in which "Russia meant more to the rest of the world than a convenient territory to be invaded."¹ But lifted from its place, Scherr's reference to Russia as a "convenient territory" serves as an apt metaphor for both the object of his lifelong scholarship and the amplitude of that work. A preponderance of his research turns on the late tsarist period and early decades of the Soviet experiment—Maxim Gorky, Alexander Grin, Sergei Eisenstein, Isaak Babel—and most of the essays collected here address this pivotal phase in Russian art, the era of European modernism. But a few extend back in time to what historians, in somewhat delphic fashion, have christened the "late modern," including the nineteenth century of Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, and one essay speaks to the work of Joseph Brodsky, whose life, though not his art, coincided with the postmodern.

Scherr's versification study, *Russian Poetry: Meter, Rhythm, and Rhyme* (1986), certainly embraces all these inflections of "the modern." Nine of the festschrift essays build directly on this foundational work, and mirroring the broad historical reach of Scherr's scholarship, their chronological span extends from the "founders" generation of Vasily Trediakovsky to Brodsky's American career in the 1970s.

As an inspirational marquee to the articles on prosody, we have placed the contribution of Barbara Heldt and G. S. Smith, who present two unpub-

¹ Barry Scherr, "Alexander Nevsky: Film without a Hero," in *Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration*, ed. Al LaValley and Barry Scherr (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 207–26, here 210.

lished letters addressed to them by that peerless student of versification, Mikhail Leonovich Gasparov (1935–2005). Heldt and Smith supplement them with an astonishing enclosure, entitled by Gasparov “Stanovlenie i razvitie evropeiskikh stikhoslozhenii,” which manages to bring off in the space of a few hundred words what the ambitious title promises.

Attentive to both close reading and the long view, Michael Wachtel chronicles the fate of the caesura in Russian poetry from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. While the caesura has been an invariant in certain meters, it nonetheless has been used for expressive purposes. Wachtel argues that it is not sufficient to ask whether a poem has caesura or not, but rather what function it serves. Beginning further back in time than any contributor, Emily Klenin writes on the Roman lyricist Catullus (c. 84–54 BCE), who has attracted modern translators on the basis of his controversial and exotic themes as well as his exploitation of hellenizing verse forms. Klenin compares Russian translations of his poem 63, which combines a striking theme and a complicated galliambic meter, a form that contemporaries associated with foreignness and transgressive sexuality. Klenin puts the translation of Maxim Amelin into that context, but also into the context of earlier translations by Adrian Piotrovsky, Sergei Shervinsky, and, especially, Afanasy Fet, whose work, like Amelin’s, clearly responds to the knotty problem of expressing Latin prosodic detail in Russian.

Alexander Zholkovsky and Evgeny Kazartsev inspect two works of Pushkin, one prose and one verse. In a meticulous reading of the *Tales of Belkin*, Kazartsev traces the subconscious invasion of Pushkin’s prose by rhythmic structures, and concludes that the stories are permeated by “iambic fragments.” In an intriguing aside, Kazartsev asserts that the iambic substructure of *Belkin* influenced Pasternak’s prose in *Doctor Zhivago*. Zholkovsky finds in Pushkin’s 1828 lyric “Sumptuous city, poor city” (“Gorod pyshnyi, gorod bednyi”) a strikingly condensed demonstration of Pushkin’s “semantics of syntax,” particularly in his skillful counterposition of a male Petersburg with the anonymous female of the poem. In Zholkovsky’s analysis, the equilibrium of the poem’s figural language is both obvious and precarious, its unstable status fortified by an ambiguity of address and the “competing referents” of one crucially placed pronoun.

Twentieth-century poets inspire the contributions of Nila Friedberg, Alyssa Gillespie, and Henry Pickford. In her essay on the iconicity of typographic “stepladder” poems, Friedberg contrasts examples from the poetry of Boris Slutsky with the most renowned stepladder poems of Vladimir Mayakovsky and his protégé, Semen Kirsanov. Friedberg claims that Slutsky’s stepladders often appear under disguise, with the connotations of the typographical order serving a precise semantic function. Gillespie’s inventory of arboreal imagery

in Marina Tsvetaeva moves through the cycle *Trees* (*Derev'ia*, 1922–23) to *The Bush* (*Kust*, 1934) and the late work “When I gaze upon the flying leaves...” (“Kogda ia gliazhu na letiashchie list'ia,” 1936). Out of this poetic itinerary, part autobiographical and part artistic, Gillespie creates a coherent but disheartening narrative of the poet’s changing aesthetic. From a metaphor for striving and dynamic equilibrium, Tsvetaeva’s trees come to signify abandonment and “utter aloneness, voicelessness.” In Velimir Khlebnikov’s “Serpent Train” (“Zmei poezda,” 1910) Pickford finds one of the poet’s characteristically metapoetical statements, in this case evoked by an image of the poet as warrior-shaman. As Pickford shows, through an orchestration of diverse intertexts, particularly Dante, Pushkin, and the legend of St. George, the poem creates and addresses a community of readers—an imaginary audience for the imaginary shaman.

Translation is Sonia Ketchian’s theme and, like Klenin, she surveys multiple renderings into Russian of one work. The Armenian writer Hovanes Tumanian’s poem “My Song” (1918) has inspired numerous translators, but Ketchian uses them all as dull foils to the brilliance of Bella Akhmadulina, whose version exemplifies for Ketchian a great poet’s theory and practice of translation.

Akhmadulina’s work rose to a rare level of attention in the West partly because Joseph Brodsky praised it. David Bethea’s essay on Brodsky appropriately follows Ketchian’s, though not merely because of this link. Both contributors are ultimately concerned with cultural translation—in Akhmadulina’s case, an act that can be performed with masterful élan, and in Brodsky’s, one that is the stuff of defeat, though it falls short of tragedy. Bethea adduces Brodsky’s realization in the pivotal “Lullaby for Cape Cod” (1976) that he cannot make a successful cultural transition to America, at least as a writer of poetry. “His magnificent Russian,” Bethea concludes, “could not translate.”

In the slightly shifted sense of “adaptation,” translation anchors a number of the festschrift articles on Russian prose. Sara Pankenier Weld explores Sergei Eisenstein’s rescripting of the Pavlik Morozov legend in his unfinished film *Bezhin Meadow* (1935). Here Eisenstein took polemical aim at Maxim Gorky, who had expounded his own interpretation of the notorious Morozov topos in the 1933 article “Onward and Upward, Komsomol!” Weld uses Naum Kleiman’s 1967 reconstruction of the Eisenstein film to ponder the co-option of Christian symbolism by the Bolsheviks, as well as the Soviet iconography of childhood with which Eisenstein does spirited battle.

Two other essays look at adaptation. Edith Clowes takes up lesser-known but central texts of Siniavsky-Terts (“Thoughts Unawares”) and Venedikt Erofeev (“An Eccentric’s View of Rozanov”) to describe two distinct

ways that Rozanov's dialogic style has been exploited by latterday writers. Both Siniavsky-Terts and Erofeev use Rozanov's elusive voice to challenge monolithic Soviet versions of selfhood.

Given the ocean of scholarship that ensued, Scherr's colleagues might need a reminder that his career began with Alexander Grin—a 1973 dissertation on Grin at the University of Chicago, followed by his co-translation of *The Seeker of Adventure* (1978), and more recently by *The Shining World: Exploring Aleksandr Grin's "Grinlandia,"* co-authored with Nicholas Luker (2007). In his essay for our volume, Luker brings to light Grin's understudied novel *The Treasure of the African Mountains* (*Sokrovishche afrikanskikh gor*, 1925), a story which Gorky had proposed for the series "Lives of Remarkable People" ("Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei"). Grin's historical novel inserts the fictional Englishman Gent into the real search of *New York Herald* journalist Henry Stanley for the missionary-explorer David Livingstone in Africa in 1869–71. Luker describes in detail the vicissitudes of the novel's publication and situates Gent in relation to the Grinian heroic paradigm.

In a scholarly nod to Barry Scherr's research on Gorky, most notably his *Maxim Gorky* (1988) and *Maksim Gorky: Selected Letters* (1997), Amy Singleton Adams gives a close reading of the 1896 story "Kononov," proposing bread-making as a key metaphor of sacramentality and profanation, especially in relation to the concept of "God-building." "Twenty-Six Men and a Girl" obviously acquires a fresh symbolic weight in her argument. Erich Lippman investigates a neighboring theme, Gorky's "personhood" in its theoretical relation to various orthodoxies, including communism and Christianity. In his probing analysis of the term, Lippman ends by refining Gorky's ever-evolving and deeply-held concept of community.

A pair of essays deal with the rich themes of gender and sexuality—Hugh McLean's on Lev Tolstoy and John Kopper's on Andrei Bely. McLean musters an *ad hoc* "node" of texts that chronicle the Tolstoy family's own struggles with sexuality. McLean christens his textual grouping "the Kreutzer complex." In addition to Lev Lvovich Tolstoy's "Chopin Prelude," McLean analyzes Sofia Andreevna Tolstaya's stories "Whose Fault?" ("Ch'ia vina?"), written in 1891 in response to *The Kreutzer Sonata's* reception), and "Song without Words" ("Pesnia bez slov"), which uncannily anticipates Thomas Mann's "Tristan" of a decade later. For all these Tolstoyan epigones, an ideally defined matrimonial state would successfully regulate sexuality, and their labors show that the troubled and highly literate Tolstoy family lived out the same concerns, with matching intensity, as the characters produced in the mind of the *pater familias*. Kopper's essay focuses on the collision of Bely's mathematically ordered imagination with gender theory, the products of the impact being "gender variables." Bely uses them to destabilize the normative gender triangles of

European literature and create gender quadrangles that are narratively inert—and therefore, in a typically Belyan move toward paradox, narratively alive.

Like Kopper, Cathy Popkin is interested in parsing the mathematics of a text, her instance being Anton Chekhov's "Ward 6" (1892). In this brutal story, where the agnostic scientist and the subtle writer meet, Popkin sees Chekhov delivering an anguished critique of the documentary impulse of his age, the compulsion for equivalencies, neat equations, and the safety of numbers. Popkin concludes, with Chekhov, that experience cannot be calibrated, particularly when it entails mental and physical suffering.

In an essay on the semantics of rhetorical procedures closely related in approach to those of Kazartsev, Zholkovsky, Friedberg, and Wachtel, Liza Knapp explores ellipses and ambiguity in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *sui generis* work *The Dead House* (1861–62). She investigates the ways these devices both support the "plausibility clause" of nineteenth-century realism (that what the narrative presents must be accepted as true) and shift the burden of interpretation onto the reader (who must redress the narrative's silence on motivation).

Though at first glance disciplinary outliers, the essays of Lenore Grenoble and Yvonne Howell fittingly conclude a volume that aspires to represent the scope of Barry Scherr's research. His 1998 article "Synagogues, Synchrony and the Sea: Babel's Odessa"—only one of several Babel entries in the Scherr bibliography—provides an appropriate companion piece to Grenoble's essay on Odessan Russian, the dialect that Babel heard as a child. Her contribution demarcates the sociolinguistics and characteristic features of Odessan Russian, and questions the degree to which the term has descriptive value in accounting for the language of the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

If Russian writers are markedly passionate about all sorts of parallel worlds—one thinks immediately of the Proustian nostalgia of Goncharov's hero for Oblomovka, Grin's "Grinlandia," the "unrealizable International" of Babel's Gedali, and Platonov's communist utopia—Yvonne Howell's article on Genrikh Altshuller's concept of "Inventive Problem-Solving" (TRIZ) explores a different kind of imagined world, the universe of science fiction. She compares the concepts of this revolutionary theoretician of cybernetics to the science fiction philosophy found in the works he penned under the transparent pseudonym of "Altov." An essay stimulated by Altshuller's interdisciplinary wingspan provides an apt metaphorical close to this volume, dedicated to a scholar whose compass is even greater.

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