Edited by John Elsworth

The Silver Age in Russian Literature

Selected Papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, 1990

General Editor: Stephen White

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THE SILVER AGE IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE FOURTH WORLD CONGRESS FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES, HARROGATE, 1990

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A strategy of this kind imposes a cost, in that many authors have had to find other outlets for what would in different circumstances have been very publishable papers. The gain, however, seems much greater: a series of real books on properly defined subjects, edited by scholars of experience and standing in their respective fields, and placed promptly before the academic community. These, I am glad to say, were the same as the objectives of the publishers who expressed an interest in various aspects of the congress proceedings, and it has led to a series of volumes as well as of special issues of journals covering a wide range of interests. There are volumes on art and architecture, on history and literature, on law and economics, on society and education. There are further volumes on nationality issues and the Ukraine, on the environment, on international relations and on defence. There are Soviet volumes, and others that deal more specifically with Eastern (or, perhaps more properly, East Central) Europe. There are interdisciplinary volumes on women in Russia and the USSR, the Soviet experience in the Second World War, and ideology and system change. There are special issues of some of the journals that publish in our field, dealing with religion and Slovene studies, émigrés and East European economics, publishing and politics, linguistics and the Russian revolution. Altogether nearly forty separate publications will stem from the Harrogate congress: more than twice as many as from any previous congress of its kind, and a rich and enduring record of its deliberations.

Most of these volumes will be published in the United Kingdom by Macmillan. It is my pleasant duty to acknowledge Macmillan's early interest in the scholarly output of the congress, and the swift and professional attention that has been given to all of these volumes since their inception. A full list of the Harrogate series appears in the Macmillan edition of this volume; it can give only an impression of the commitment and support I have enjoyed from Tim Farmiloe, Clare Wace and others at all stages of our proceedings. I should also take this opportunity to thank John Morison and his colleagues on the International Council for Soviet and East European Studies for entrusting me with this responsible task in the first place, and the various sponsors – the Erasmus Prize Fund of Amsterdam, the Ford Foundation in New York, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Council, the Stefan Batory Trust and others – whose generous support helped to make the congress a reality.

The next congress will be held in 1995, and (it is hoped) at a

location in Eastern Europe. Its proceedings can hardly hope to improve upon the vigour and imagination that is so abundantly displayed on the pages of these splendid volumes.

University of Glasgow STEPHEN WHITE

Preface

The chapters of this volume are based upon papers that were delivered to the Fourth International Conference of ICSEES in Harrogate in July 1990. The conference was unprecedented in the extent to which participants from Russia and other countries were able to exchange views and information without any trace of former ideological inhibitions. This volume reflects that situation in a modest measure, containing contributions from Russians resident both in Russia and in the West, as well as from Western specialists. The chapters are devoted to Russian writers who were active at the very end of the nineteenth century and during the first three decades of the twentieth. Out of ten contributions six are devoted to poets and four to prose writers, and the volume is so arranged that those on poets are placed first. Within the two sections the sequence of chapters follows an approximate chronology.

Ivan Konevskoi was a poet of immense promise who died tragically young in 1901. Revered by his immediate contemporaries and significantly influential upon his successors, he has never been accorded any extensive critical consideration, and Joan Grossman's essay that opens this volume is a foretaste of a fuller study that is in preparation.

Three chapters are devoted to the poet and painter Maksimilian Voloshin. V.Kupchenko describes the full scope of Voloshin's memoir legacy, which has not hitherto been collected or surveyed in its entirety. This essay is an important example of a process that has been taking place in the last few years in Soviet scholarship, the process of the retrieval and re-interpretation of previously disavowed or neglected authors. Natalie Roklina's contribution examines a central theme and pattern of imagery in Voloshin's poetry, one that links him unmistakably to the Symbolist movement, while Vera Adamantova demonstrates in a close analysis his skill and insight as a translator of poetry.

The poetry of Viacheslav Ivanov has enjoyed a considerable revival of interest lately. Denis Mickiewicz contributes to that revival an essay that explores and clarifies the immense complexities of a poem which addresses the central point at issue between the Symbolists and their successors, the Acmeists: the role of Apollo, God of clarity and form.

The world of classical Greece likewise provides the background of Benedikt Livshits' poem cycle *Patmos*, discussed by Ronald Vroon. Livshits is another poet to whom little attention has been paid until very recently. Ronald Vroon shows how he develops beyond the movements which earlier claimed his allegiance and reveals in these poems, written between 1919 and 1927, his individual voice.

It could hardly be said that Gorky has suffered critical neglect. Yet his status as an unchallengeable Soviet luminary has in fact done much to inhibit serious study. Andrew Barratt examines a telling ambiguity in one of his early stories, which must lead to a reconsideration of some accepted notions about him.

Sologub, too, has been extensively written about, particularly in the West. Nevertheless Milton Ehre succeeds in casting a fresh glance upon his best-known and most discussed novel, and presenting a convincing new reading of its central themes.

Lena Szilard takes a single name from Belyi's *Kotik Letaev* and explains its significance in terms of the Symbolists' interpretation of the world of Dante. This in turn is developed into a speculative argument about the consequences for Russian culture of missing that stage of pre-Renaissance which Dante represents and which, in her view, the Symbolists sought to retrieve.

The volume ends with an essay by Robert Maguire and John Malmstad which juxtaposes two of the best-known novels of the early twentieth century. They show the wealth of textual references that Zamiatin's *We* makes to Belyi's *Petersburg*. The influence of Belyi's novel on prose writers of the following generation is a commonplace critical observation of long standing. Nevertheless this is in fact the first time that such a connection has been demonstrated in detail.

Manchester JOHN ELSWORTH

Notes on the Contributors

Vera Adamantova received her MA in Slavic Studies from the University of Ottawa in 1977 and her PhD from McGill University in 1984. She is at present Assistant Professor at the University of Western Ontario. She has published books and articles on the work of Voloshin and on women's writing.

Andrew Barratt took his BA and PhD degrees at the University of Durham. He taught at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic for three years before moving to New Zealand in 1977. He is currently Senior Lecturer and Chairman of the Department of Russian and Soviet Studies at the University of Otago. His publications include books on Olesha, Bulgakov and Lermontov, and he is at present preparing a full-length study of Gorky.

Milton Ehre received his bachelor's degree at the City College of New York in 1955 and a PhD from Columbia in 1970. Since 1967 he has taught at the University of Chicago, where he is now Professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. He is the author of books on Goncharov and Babel, has edited and translated the dramatic works of Gogol, and published articles on Gogol, Chekhov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Zamiatin, Solzhenitsyn, Bakhtin and Olesha. He is currently working on Chekhov.

John Elsworth received his MA and PhD degrees from the University of Cambridge. From 1964 to 1987 he taught at UEA Norwich and is now Sir William Mather Professor of Russian Studies at the University of Manchester. He has also taught at the University of Virginia and at Berkeley. He has written on the life and work of Belyi, and is currently preparing a new translation of Belyi's novel *The Silver Dove*.

Joan Delaney Grossman took her MA at Columbia in 1962 and her PhD at Harvard in 1967. Since 1968 she has taught at the University of California at Berkeley, where she is currently Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures. She is the author of books on Edgar Allan Poe in Russia and on Valerii Briusov, and has translated Briusov's diary. At present she is working on a book-length study of Ivan

Konevskoi and collaborating on a monograph on *Life as Literature: Cultural Creation in Russian Modernism.*

Vladimir Kupchenko graduated from the Faculty of Journalism at the University of the Urals in Sverdlovsk in 1961. He is a member of the Writers' Union of the USSR. He has published over a hundred articles and in recent years has edited several volumes of works by Voloshin.

Robert Maguire received his MA and PhD degrees from Columbia University, where he is now Professor of Russian Literature. He has held visiting posts at Dartmouth, Duke, Yale, Illinois and Indiana. He has published books on Soviet literature in the 1920s and on twentieth-century views of Gogol, and is at present preparing a study of Gogol's life and works and a book on Pasternak's prose.

John Malmstad is Samuel Hazzard Cross Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University. He taught for many years at Columbia University. He has written extensively on, and edited the works of, a number of early twentieth-century Russian poets, such as Belyi, Khodasevich and Kuzmin. He is completing a biography of Kuzmin and preparing a critical biography of Belyi.

Cynthia Marsh received her BA from the University of Nottingham and her MA and PhD from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University of London. Since 1972 she has been Lecturer in Russian at the University of Nottingham. She is the author of a book on synaesthesia in the poetry of Voloshin and has also written on synaesthesia in the work of a number of other writers.

Denis Mickiewicz is Professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Classics at Emory University, Atlanta. He is the author of many works on Russian poetry of the early twentieth century.

Natalie Roklina took a degree in computer translation and theory of probability at Leningrad State University. In 1978 she emigrated to the USA. She received an MA in French literature from the University of Cincinnati in 1980 and a PhD in Slavic Literatures from the University of Illinois in 1989. She is currently Assistant Professor of Russian and French at Skidmore College, and is preparing a number of articles on aspects of Voloshin's work.

Lena Szilard was educated in Leningrad and has been teaching at the University of Budapest since the 1960s. She has published extensively on the work of Belyi, Bulgakov and other Russian writers of the twentieth century.

Ronald Vroon received his BA, MA and PhD degrees at the University of Michigan (in 1969, 1971 and 1978) and taught at the University of Pennsylvania from 1978 to 1987 (including a period as Visiting Associate Professor at Columbia). Since 1987 he has been at UCLA, where he is Professor. His recent publications include a monograph and an article on Livshits, and work on verse theory. Besides these topics he is currently working on the Old Belief and the New Peasant Poets.

Contents

1 Ivan Konevskoi: *Bogatyr* of Russian Symbolism

Joan Delaney Grossman

The accidental drowning of Ivan Konevskoi in 1901 at the age of twenty-three left Russian Symbolism with the small icon for which Valerii Briusov provided the inscription: 'Wise child'.[1] The posthumous volume of Konevskoi's writings edited by Briusov and published by Scorpio was meant to fix his image in the memory of his generation, and it succeeded in doing so, at least for an important few: Blok, Belyi, Ivanov, along with Briusov and Bal'mont. His reputation was still alive a decade and more later and his importance to poets of a new generation is attested.[2] Vladimir Gippius passed on recollections of his boyhood friend to his pupil Osip Mandelstam, as the latter remembered in *The Noise of Time*.[3] Yet another few years, and D.S. Mirsky could call Konevskoi 'one of the esoteric classics of Russian poetry', destined to emerge repeatedly as 'a poet's vademecum'.[4]

Ivan (Oreus) Konevskoi began his literary course in the mid-1890s. Though quickly identified as one of the 'new poets', he was not, as Briusov observed, a 'literary figure [*literator*]. For him poetry was exactly that which poetry must be in its essence: the poet making clear to himself his own thoughts and feelings'.[5] His lines seemed difficult and sometimes rough, as Mandelstam put it later, 'like the rustling of a forest down to its roots.'[6] For he was less occupied with poetics than with fundamental questions about the universe. What is its inner structure? How is the individual related to its ongoing process of change, and how is that relationship to be perfected? Konevskoi's firm pantheistic belief was coupled with an equally strong insistence on the individual human personality. Convinced that 'the way down is the way out' to the understanding he sought, he took introspection as his method, and with notable result. Mirsky credited him with 'moments of revelation, majestic and intense, that few poets have dreamed of'.[7]

Konevskoi's writings, published and unpublished, over his short career show him sharing or anticipating many of the tastes and preoccupations of both Symbolist generations: Dostoevsky, Poe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Tiutchev, Fet, Solov'ev, the early French and Belgian Symbolists, the new Scandinavian writing. Moreover the

English Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites, German Romantic painting and new departures in Russian art all seized and held his attention.

So many starts in so many promising directions: where did it all lead? In his few short years, did Konevskoi reach any synthesis? And were any particular paths on which he pioneered followed up meaningfully by his successor poets? It seems that some were, and that among them were his attraction to Old Russia – pre-Petrine, even pre-Christian Rus' – and, linked to it, his interest in modern Russian art, especially the painting of Viktor Vasnetsov and Mikhail Vrubel'. Indeed his work gives possibly the earliest evidence among the modernist poets of the Old Russian theme transposed into a new, symbolist key.[8]

In the late summer and early autumn of 1896, these two attractions of Konevskoi's received a series of stimuli. Near the end of August, just before enrolling in the historical– philological faculty of St Petersburg University, he travelled to the All-Russian Exhibition at Nizhnii-Novgorod with two school friends, the brothers Aleksandr and Ivan Bilibin.[9] For the three young men the exhibition's high point apparently was the artistic exhibit of the works of Vasnetsov and others of the Wanderer School and, especially, in a separate pavilion built by S.I. Mamontov for their display, two decorative panels by Vrubel'.[10] Konevskoi carefully listed in his notebook the paintings that impressed him and, contemplating the Vrubel' panel showing the elder bogatyrs Mikula Selianinovich and Vol'ga Sviatoslavich, he was moved to call it 'The first experiment in new, fresh spheres of painting.'[11]

On their return trip the party stopped in Moscow, where Konevskoi was enthralled by the Tret'iakov Gallery. Here again he assiduously listed paintings, especially those on historical and legendary themes. His and possibly, too, Ivan Bilibin's interest in Old Russian themes seems to date from this journey.[12] Within a few weeks of their return to St Petersburg, Konevskoi was listening to university lectures by I.N. Zhdanov, a leading folklorist of the comparative school of A.N. Veselovskii, on Fedor Buslaev's views on the folk epos.[13]

Two solitary walking trips in the summers of 1897 and 1898 in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and northern Italy distracted Konevskoi from Russian matters for a time. German art, alpine nature and the pantheistic transports he experienced in the mountains and forests opened a vein of mystical poetry and prose. However, on a visit to Kiev in September 1897, he found himself face to face with the 'Russian question'. In an essay, 'Two National Elements', written at that time he tried, by comparing German and Russian nature, to define to some degree the Russian spirit.[14] In that attempt he invoked the names of the

three elder bogatyrs, Vol'ga, Sviatogor and Mikula. In August 1898, after the second of his foreign tours, he addressed himself again to this matter. In 'Rus' (From a Chronicle of Wandering)' again comparing Germany and Russia, he meditated on the Russian spirit's meekness and the deformations of Russian history reflected in Russian architecture.[15] These meditations were tinged with impressions of Tiutchev and Sologub.

Yet in no way did this preoccupation with race and history signal Konevskoi's abandonment of the search for self-understanding and the total freedom of spirit it promised. Instead his poetry shows how through these he sought channels to the essential life flowing deep in nature: in the earth, in man's unconscious, but also in the history and prehistory of race and clan.

By the summer of 1899, Konevskoi apparently felt he had reached some sort of marker in his life. Early that year sixteen of his poems were published.[16] Also during that year he transferred from the classical division of the historical–philological faculty to the Slavic–Russian section.[17] Old Russian and folkloric notes heard in his poetry at earlier stages become prominent at this time. The two poems under the single title 'The Elder Bogatyrs' (1900) are especially significant in that they draw into focus various of Konevskoi's interests and concerns, artistic and philosophical, that were now reaching definition.[18]

The two heroes of the poems are the 'elder bogatyrs' Sviatogor and Volkh Vseslav'evich, titanic figures identified with the pre-Kievan epos. A third 'elder bogatyr', Mikula Selianinovich, is alluded to without being named. Along with many other folkloric elements, the bogatyrs figured prominently as symbols in the Russian populist milieu of the 1870s and 1880s.[19] The developing neo-romantic tendency in folkloristics and ethnography of that time went hand in hand with idealisation of the peasant tradition and popular creation in other spheres.

Cultivation of native arts and culture was a founding principle of the art colony at Savva Mamontov's Abramtsevo. A central personage at Abramtsevo for many years was Viktor Vasnetsov. At Abramtsevo, Vasnetsov worked on one of his major canvases, 'The Bogatyrs'. Upon its completion in 1898, the painting was promptly acquired by the Tret'iakov Gallery.[20] There it would certainly have been seen by Konevskoi on one of his visits to Moscow. Vasnetsov's conception of Il'ia Muromets, Dobrynia Nikitich and Alesha Popovich, bogatyrs of the Kievan epic cycle, rendered these legendary figures powerfully against a realistic background that seems to stress their national

character rather than any fantastic of mythic qualities. The contrast is obvious with Vrubel''s representation of Vol'ga (Volkh) and Mikula, where nature is minimised and the giant figures are locked in mysterious combat. This could only have reinforced Konevskoi's belief that Vrubel''s work opened 'new, fresh spheres of painting'.

Born in 1856, and eighteen years younger than Vasnetsov, Vrubel' also worked at Abramtsevo and shared many of its values and sympathies. Yet Vrubel' was – and was recognised and denigrated for it at the time – an early exponent of decadent and symbolist values in painting.[21] His Vol'ga–Mikula panel (entitled 'Mikula Selianinovich') was rejected by the Nizhnii-Novgorod exhibition art jury 'for pretentiousness'[22] and appeared there only because of Mamontov's quick action in providing facilities. Three years later his 'Bogatyr' was rejected by Diaghilev for the 1899 World of Art exhibition, though previously and subsequently Diaghilev was eager to show Vrubel''s work.[23]

Vrubel' had hoped for 'Bogatyr' to free him from the label of 'decadent' which his painting of Lermontov's 'Demon' had earned him and which he disclaimed.[24] However his vision of these figures from ancient legend was infused with a spirit far distant from any exaltation of a popular hero. The critic Kign (V.L. Dedlov) marvelled at Vrubel''s penetration of the drama in 'Mikula Selianinovich': on the one hand the immense, unconscious strength of this peasant giant, and on the other Vol'ga 'Varangian, wizard, wonder-worker', horrified and wildly trying to understand 'that giant–child who has conquered him, a victory that he cannot yet believe'.[25] Almost no natural background is present except the vast sky and strips of land beneath. In his 'Bogatyr', by contrast, the landscape, as one critic described it, 'is not a background or place of action but the very medium in which the bogatyr exists....Vrubel' tries to blend them into a certain unity, to show the bogatyr as part of nature's overflowing power poeticized in folk mythology'.[26]

This implicit pantheism, together with the hinted mystery in all these figures, differentiated Vrubel''s conceptions from those of the Wanderers and from populist ideology. It allied him rather with Tiutchev and Vladimir Solov'ev but also with the mythological school of Buslaev. For Konevskoi, Vrubel''s evocations of ancient lore resonated with his own notions, possibly formed in part on Buslaev's ideas. Buslaev's work on the bogatyr epos presented the notion of a bogatyr-type formed in the titanic period and deeply connected with the earth: the 'bogatyr-elemental' already described by Konstantin Aksakov.[27] Sviatogor most clearly embodies this type.