

## **Russian Poetry at the End of the Soviet Empire**

### **Ivan Akhmetev**

The Soviet period of Russian poetry was distinguished by the prominence of three distinct movements, isolated from one another as a result of the power of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) – official Soviet poetry, informal or underground unprintable poetry, and diaspora or emigrant poetry.

Freedom of publication in the last 25 years has depicted for us a fuller landscape of twentieth-century Russian poetry, including all three movements mentioned above. Currently, the exceptional importance of Lianozovo Group poets, such as Evgenii Kropivnitskii (1893-1979), Igor Kholin (1920-1999), Genrikh Sapgir (1928-1999), Vsevolod Nekrasov (1934-2009) and Ian Satunovskii (1913-1982), is becoming more and more obvious.

I have prepared several publications and will tell you about four out of the five major Lianozovo Group poets. I will exclude Genrikh Sapgir, since a lot has been written about Sapgir, including a monograph dedicated to him.

All of the Lianozovo Group poets were unprintable and their poems did not appear in official Soviet publications. Children's literature was a kind of outlet for them because some of the poems by Kholin, Sapgir, Nekrasov, and Satunovskii were considered to be appropriate for children to various degrees. The only publication by Kropivnitskii published during the Soviet era was a collection of poems included in a children's compilation. He apparently did not write for children, but some of his poems were well suited to children's reading. The same can be said about Nekrasov.

An important turning point in the development of Russian poetry was the Samizdat (self-published) journal "Sintaksis" ("The Syntax") that existed between 1959 and 1960. Its creator, Aleksandr Ginzburg, was able to bring together the most gifted authors of Moscow and Leningrad (Saint-Petersburg), who did not fit into the Soviet publishing system. Kholin, Sapgir, and Nekrasov participated in and collaborated on the journal as representatives of the Lianozovo Group. Ginzburg managed to release three issues of the journal, after which he was arrested. Ginzburg had attempted to establish an alternative cultural institution that had no political connection. The authorities' response showed that under Soviet conditions, it was impossible to divert from a political course. From then on, there was a sharp distinction between the official and unofficial literatures in the Soviet Union. Publications of unofficial/underground material began taking place both in the Soviet Union as Samizdat (self-published) and abroad as Tamizdat (published "over there").

It should be mentioned that unlike Kholin and Sapgir, Nekrasov and Satunovskii were not disciples of Evgenii Leonidovich Kropivnitskii. One could

say that each of them founded his own school; in any case, they each had a strong influence on other poets. All five of them were representing the Lianozovo Group. These authors, in our opinion, are central to the new Russian poetry. However, we must recognize that this assertion is not universally accepted. The first official publication of these five classics occurred in the late 1980s after the perestroika; yet, some of their works have never been published.

The existing publications are not very accessible, and they have not attracted wide publicity in the press. Besides, they have only recently been released. This is the state of modern Russian literature. We hope that over time the Lianozovo Group poetry will be regarded as an intrinsic and critical part of Russian poetry, which will be advantageous for the legacy of the Lianozovo poets and have great impact on the genre today.

## EVGENII LEONIDOVICH KROPIVNITSKII

Kropovnikskii was a founder of the Lianozovo Group of artists and poets, himself being a first-rate artist and poet, and he was the oldest member of the group -- they called him "grandpa." Therefore, I'll start with him.

He was born on July 13 (25) of 1893 in Moscow, in the family of a railroad officer. His father wrote prose and published in periodicals; his mother wrote children's poetry, which she also published in the contemporary periodicals. Both father and mother were very musical: father was a good singer and mother provided accompaniment on the piano.

The poet Filaret Ivanovich Chernov (1877-1940) was the family friend -- he was the first, as we will see, to acknowledge the exceptional value of Kropivnikskii's poetry.

In 1904-1911 Kropivnikskii studied at the Imperial Stroganov Art Institute -- he graduated with the title of "learned artist." In 1912-1920 he lived in Moscow, worked in theaters as a decorator and makeup artist, and studied in Shaniavskii's People's University in the Department of History (1915-1918). In 1920-1923 he lived and worked in the towns of the North, Urals, and Siberia: in Vologda, Glazov and Tumen. In 1920 in Vologda, he met Olga Ananievna Potapova (1892-1971), who became his wife. Under the influence of her husband Olga began to study art seriously and, later, took classes in Moscow from "Jack of Diamonds" (Bubnovyi Valet) group members Mashkov and V. Rozhdestvenskii. At the end of the 1950s she was painting very fine abstract pieces. In Tumen, the couple's son, artist and poet Lev Kropivnikskii (1922-1993), was born. Their daughter, artist Valentina Kropivnikskaia (1924-2008), was born in Moscow.

Beginning in 1923, the Kropivnitskiis lived in the countryside near Moscow. Evgenii Leonidovich worked as an art teacher in the Tuchkovo Forest School. From 1934 he lived in Dolgoprudnyi (a village near a train station near Moscow). After the death of his wife and before his own death, he lived in Moscow. He worked as an art teacher at schools until his retirement in 1958.

He became member of the Union of the Soviet Artists in 1939. In 1963 he was accused of being a "formalist" and founder of an anti-Soviet Lianozovo Group and was expelled from the Moscow subdivision of the Artists Union.

He lived all his adult life in poverty: "As long as I remember myself, starting with the Revolution, I was hungry and cold." Therefore, his lifestyle was ascetic not by choice -- this fact was reflected in the tone of his art.

Kropivnitskii treated the political upheavals in Russia as some elemental forces that threatened the fragile existence of humans. He himself was not repressed, but in 1946 his son was arrested and kept in Stalin's camps until 1956.

Kropivnitskii wrote poetry and painted till his last days. His last poem was written on the 19th of October, 1978. He died on the 19th of January, at the age of 85.

### **The Teacher. Lianozovo Group**

After the war, besides teaching art Kropivnitskii was supervising a poetry seminar at the Pioneer Palace of Leningrad District of Moscow. One of his students was Genrikh Sapgir. And in art he was the teacher of Oscar Rabin, who later married his daughter, Valentina Kropivnitskaia.

Kropivnitskii's socializing with his students was not limited to official seminar time. Many of them visited their teacher in Dolgoprudnaia where they socialized, took walks, and discussed all kinds of topics. Unofficially, Kholin was also a student of Kropivnitskii from 1949.

An ability to attract and unite people was especially apparent in the years following the World War II. After Stalin's death, life became more bearable. A group of artists and poets was formed around Kropivnitskii, which was later called the Lianozovo Group. The name came into being because in 1956, Rabin and Kropivnitskaia settled near Lianozovo station by Dolgoprudnaia. Rabin and his wife Kropivnitskaia began organizing exhibits of works by family members and friends.

The core members of the Group were Kholin, Sapgir, Rabin, the Kropivnitskiis, including artists Nemukhin, Masterkova, and Vechtomov, as well

as poets Nekrasov and Satunovskii. Among Kropivnitskii's friends were B. Sveshnikov and then a young poet, Eduard Limonov.

## **Art**

In his autobiography, Kropivnitskii wrote that he "created mainly three types of arts: drawing and painting; writing verses; composing music."

Music was in the third place. Apparently, he composed in the earliest period of his artistic career. "From 1914 I composed music--wrote some pieces, romances, opera scenes to "Kiribeevich." Later, I had no access to the piano and could not continue composing music."

In the history of Russian art, Kropivnitskii's significant contribution was in painting and poetry. Also, he was the head of Lianozovo Group where poets and artists were united under his leadership.

As far as I know, Kropivnitskii's artistic growth and evolution has not been studied or described yet. His works from 1940s were destroyed, lost or preserved in unknown places. It would be exciting to discuss his works as a whole, in all fullness and complexity or to analyze his artistic and poetic development. Nobody has yet attempted to do so.

## **Poetry**

Kropivnitskii wrote poetry beginning in 1909. In some earlier poems there was an influence of Symbolism. In 1918-1922, He wrote a series of realist poems, which were devoted to city and country life: These poems had similarities with Malakhieva-Mirovich's poems from her collection of "Monastery Life." Tatiana Neshumova will speak about Malakhieva-Mirovich during our second lecture in the Browsing Room, on Wednesday, October 8, 2014.

In mid-1930s, Kropivnitskii created his own poetics, which combined the classical versification with grotesque and primitivism. The first person, who understood the meaning of these poems and foresaw their future in Russian literature, was Filaret Chernov. He welcomed the birth of a new genuine Russian poet. "What you are doing is so unusual, so much unlike everything else that has been done with the poetry by other nations earlier, that I am astonished. Amazing sharpness!"

What is characteristic is that on the surface, these poems were not any different from traditional Russian verses – they comprised meter, stanzas and

rhymes. The poems acquired new quality and dimensions by very subtle techniques, for example, shifting the viewpoint, changing the focus, variation of the intonation, playing with the source of the poetic speech, moving that source to a different consciousness.

Kropivnitskii was born in the same year as Mayakovsky. Many representatives of Russian avant-garde were his contemporaries. Kropivnitskii silently observed and studied the avant-garde for himself. In mid-1930s, due to his ingenious sensitivity he realized that history had already left the avant-garde behind and abandoned it since the transformation of the man/human being did not happen. He grinned ironically and bitterly at the idea of transformation because he understood and believed in technical progress. Instead, Kropivnitskii turned toward the existential foundation of life. That is why his poems are akin to the Eastern categories of wabi-sabi including modesty, solitude, lack of brightness, but also inner strength, reality, and authenticity. One may also mention the main theme of existentialism, namely the category of facticity and of being thrown into existence. The other side of this complex poetic identity is compassion towards the "superfluous man /small man," the one who lives in barracks and is doomed to potter about the bare necessities of everyday life. Kropivnitskii does not look down upon that everyday life although he cannot help resorting to irony. He called himself the poet of the suburbs, but he can be as well called the poet of the suburbs. In his poems, he reflected not only the life but also the death of the suburb dwellers. A very harsh and straightforward outlook is combined here with some special sad softness of the tone. There is no affectedness whatsoever, nothing high-blown. One may say Kropivnitskii's life and poetry present the most adequate response to the challenge of the totalitarian era.

It is characteristic of Kropivnitskii's "barracks" or "suburb" poetry that everyday life and not any lofty ideas and ideals serve as a source of his inspiration. Everyday life on the threshold between life and death. On the threshold where it ceases to be any "lifestyle" of an epoch but becomes the life of a person per se. Kropivnitskii, as he himself states, "wrote from nature, avoiding any invention or falsity."

Eduard Limonov called him "the Soviet stoic." Kropivnitskii also authored some religious poetry and he trained himself in humility as much as he did in courage and patience; also, he had the memory of death, as the ascetics call it. The above-mentioned Limonov recalled this expression of Kropivnitskii, "Art cures aggressiveness and many other major and minor illnesses."

Here is Kropivnitskii's important phrase from a text written in 1956: "Dynamism left along with impressionism. Statics is solemn and magical. Statics is the mystery of life where everything is frozen in eternal immobility as if in a prayerful contemplation."

It is not an accident that Kropivnitskii has never attempted to publish his poems, understanding way too well their incompatibility with the official Soviet poetry. It might partially be the discretion inherent in an "inner emigrant" although the latter definition does not suit Kropivnitskii that well.

It is characteristic that he never used a typewriter preferring to copy and bind his poetry collections by hand.

Since 1950s, his family members typewrote some of his book. That was already the Samizdat era. Limonov who recalls, "Evgenii Leonidovich was so sunny and positive that none of the horrific conditions of the time could darken him", typewrote some of his books.

As to Tamizdat, his poems began to appear abroad (over there) during his lifetime since 1977. Around that time, in 1976, several poems were included into a children's poetry compilation "Between Summer and Winter" by Vsevolod Nekrasov. This was the only time Kropivnitskii saw his own poems published in the Soviet Union.

I would like to recite some of his poems to demonstrate and distinguish main characteristic features of his poetic style.

Kropivnitskii apparently never wrote for children, and yet there is some child-like quality in his verse of contemplation and surprise.

\* \* \*

Мне очень нравится, когда  
Тепло и сыро. И когда  
Лист прело пахнет. И когда  
Даль в сизой дымке. И когда  
Так грустно, тихо. И когда  
Все словно медлит. И когда  
Везде туман, везде вода.

1940

\*

I like it very much when  
the weather is wet and warm,  
that rotten leaf smell. When  
the distance is lit up by a haze  
so sorrowful and silent. When  
everything moves slowly. And when  
the fog is everywhere and water also.

Translated by Alex Cigale

### **Жилище (Кухня)**

В небольшом полутемном жилище  
Днем и ночью горят примусищи  
И готовят кашищи и щищи.  
И довольны и рады жильчищи,  
Что у них изобилие пищи.

1940

### **Dwelling (Kitchen)**

In a small half-dark dwelling  
Day and night the huge kerosene burners are alight  
Day and night the huge portions of gruel and shchi soup are alight  
And the huge dwellers of the dwelling are glad  
They have a huge abundance of food.

### **Фабрика**

Вот фабрика. На ней  
ВыдělываюТ мыло.  
А в сини прошлых дней  
На этом месте было

Болото. Лягушня

Весной здесь страстно пела,  
Звучащая мушья  
Металась оголтело;

По дебрям пер медведь  
Мохнатый... Это было ?  
Все это было ведь  
До этого, до мыла.

1945

### **Factory**

Here is the factory where  
Soap is made  
And in the blue haze of the past days  
There was here

A marsh  
Frogs sang passionately  
Flies tossed around  
Rabidly

In the wilderness  
A shaggy bear  
Was thorough-going  
This was before that... soap.

Here is a 1947 poem, "A Half-Erased Epitaph."

### **Полустертая эпитафия**

Здесь похоронен... (временно ?  
Кладбище ликвидируют.)  
Во цвете лет... Безвременно...  
(Тут, видимо, датируют.)  
(И дальше крупно) ? ОВ



(Должно быть, Иванов.)

### **A Half-Erased Epitaph**

Here lies ? (temporarily ?  
the cemetery being moved.)  
Flush of years... For all eternity...  
(Here, it seems, followed dates.)  
(Then all in capitals) ? OF  
(Most probably, IVANOF.)

Translated by Alex Cigale

\* \* \*

Электричества нету.  
Что нам делать без света? -  
Ни читать,  
Ни писать...  
Спать?  
Приходится спать.

1964

\*

We haven't any electricity.  
What's there to do without light?  
You can't read and you can't write.  
We could sleep. Yes, we will sleep...

Translated by Alex Cigale

These poems revealed minimalism that was natural for Kropivnitsii, rejection of any extra words and even extra emotions. A poem entitled "Advice to Poets" is very characteristic in that respect:

## **Совет поэтам**

Длинные стихи  
Читать трудно  
И нудно.

Пишите короткие стихи.  
В них меньше вздора  
И прочесть их можно скоро.

1965

## **Advice to Poets**

Long poems are  
Difficult to read  
and breed boredom.

Write shorter poems.  
They contain less excess  
And can be quickly read.

Translated by Alex Cigale

\* \* \*

Зданий новых кубы  
Сугубы.  
Кубизм осуществился.

Вот Сезанн бы удивился,  
Что кубизм осуществился!

1964

\*

The cubes of new buildings  
Are particular  
Cubism was implemented

Cezanne would have been surprized  
To see cubism implemented!

Kropivnitskii wrote many poems on behalf of different persons and even creatures, such as a fly or a fish:

### **В пруду**

Расширила жабры и стала:  
Куда еще можно поплыть?  
У берега смерть ожидала:  
Там некто задумал удить.

Но помнила памятью тайной  
Про то, как сорвался крючок...  
Уплыла... О, этот случайный  
И острый крючок и толчок!

Теперь осторожность, неспешность  
Движений... Мерцает вода...  
Воды завлекательна нежность...  
Что ж, плыть?.. но зачем?.. и куда?..

1952

### **In the Pond**

It opened the gills and froze:  
Where else to swim?  
There was death near the shore  
Someone was fishing there

But it had a secret memory

Of a torn hook  
And escape... she escaped  
Oh, this accidental hook and jerk.

Now carefully, slowly  
The water is shimmering around  
And it's tenderness is enticing  
So should it swim? but what for? and where?

\* \* \*

Незабудки на болоте  
Расцвели по новой моде:  
Оголились до пупа.

А одна, не будь глупа,  
Хоть была и некрасива,  
Задрала подол спесиво.

Ею был побит рекорд -  
И на ней женился черт.

1969

\*

Forget-me-nots are blossoming in the marshes  
They are naked up to their belly buttons  
Following the new vogue

And one, being smart  
Although it is ugly  
Proudly raised her skirt  
And in record time  
Married a devil

**Замараев**

Приходил художник Замараев.  
Не одобрил живопись мою...  
И стою один я у сараев  
И стихи печальные пою.

Поглядел художник Замараев  
И нашел, что все совсем не так.  
Объяснял мне долго Замараев,  
Что писать мне следует и как.

Я стою печально у сараев  
И стихи печальные пою...  
Караул! ? художник Замараев  
Не одобрил живопись мою.

1973

### **Zamarayev**

Zamarayev, an artist, visited with me  
And disapproved of my paintings  
So I am here standing alone near the barns  
And I am singing sad poems

Zamaraev, an artist, eavesdropped  
Zamaraev found everything is wrong  
Zamaraev was explaining to me  
What is right, for a long time

I am standing in a sad mood near the barns  
And I am singing sad poems  
Help! --- Zamaraev, an artist  
Disapproved of my paintings

Translated by Julia Nemirovskaya (unless otherwise stated)

## IGOR KHOLIN

Igor Sergeevich Kholin was born in Moscow on January 11, 1920. It was a time when the country was devastated by the Civil War, which was, in fact, a series of attempts to take away the power seized by the Bolsheviks. It went hand in hand with famine and epidemics. Kholin's father died of typhoid right after the war. The family was poor. The little boy was relinquished and sent to an orphanage. He ran away a few times and became a gamin. In 1932 he was forced to stay in the Solotcha orphanage near the city of Riazan. He nearly starved to death. Kids saved their own lives by stealing from the nearby villages. Kholin escaped again and vagabonded. Then he was adopted by the Red Army soldiers and spent the next ten years of his life with them. He played trumpet in the Sergeant Military School in Kharkov, Ukraine. In 1937 he quit army and found himself in Novorossiisk, Russia where he worked at a power plant. In 1940 he was drafted.

When the war with the Germans started on the June 22, 1941, Kholin was in the Military School. He was in combat all four years of the war. He was wounded twice and got military awards. He left the army as an officer (captain). After the war, he was arrested and imprisoned in a concentration camp. It is not clear what he was accused of (Sapgir said Kholin had a fight with someone). He served his time near the village of Dolgoprudnyi, north of Moscow. It so happened that one of the camp bosses was in his military unit during the war. He arranged for Kholin to serve as a self-administered guard. During the hours on duty in the watch tower Kholin began, for the first time in his life, to compose poems.

Self-administered guards were allowed to go outside the camp walls but not far from them. Kholin went to the village library and requested a volume of Aleksandr Blok's poems. The librarian asked if he himself wrote poetry, and when he said yes, she invited him to her place. Thus Kholin met Evgenii Leonidovich Kropivnitskii and his wife Olga Potapova who turned out to be that librarian.

Here begins the story of Kholin the poet. His earliest poems are lost. He himself admitted they were very bad. But Kropivnitskii was a wonderful teacher and Kholin a capable student.

This is how Lianozovo Group of Poetry came into being. In the beginning, it consisted of two authors.

Kholin wrote:

"The first poem I think was really good was written in 1952:

\* \* \*

Вот сосед мой,  
Как собака:  
Слово скажешь -  
Лезет в драку.  
Проживаю я в бараке,  
Он - в сарае у барака.

\*

Here's my neighbor  
He's like a dog  
If you say a word to him  
He'll start a fight  
I live in barracks  
And he in a barn near the barracks.”

This poem was the beginning of the "Barracks Dwellers" book. By that time Kholin was released and settled in barracks in a proletarian suburb of Moscow, in Novosimonova Sloboda. He continued to visit his teacher. In that same year, 1952, Genrikh Sapgir returned from army service. He studied at Kropivnitskii's seminar as early as the 1940s. Kholin and Sapgir became friends for the rest of their lives. They even died in one and the same year, 1999.

By 1958, "The Barrack Dwellers" was finished. Vladislav Kulakov called it "the classical epic of new Russian literature." In these poems, Kholin followed one of the paths his teacher had shown him, that of a realistic, grotesquely harsh depiction of the everyday life of city dwellers. Unfortunately, the book was published only 40 years later, which was the first representative collection of Kholin's works. Yet in 1950s his poetry was spread and disseminated via Samizdat.

The poems were so convincing that people quoted them even if they doubted their literary value. Some poems turned into Russian folklore known to all:

\* \* \*

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

\*

At Sokol subway station  
A daughter killed her mother  
The reason for the scandal  
Trying to share things  
Now it is  
In the order of things

This was the voice of reality itself, the Russian life in the time of socialism. Kholin calmly recorded the circumstances of the miserable and senseless life of the barracks dwellers. He took the mirror to one's face saying: here, you are like this. In this mirror, not only the dwellers of barracks, but also those who lived in apartments and personal dachas [summer houses], could recognize themselves. These poems become art because of their precision and elegance. There is also inherent in them some kind of stoic geniality.

The routine revolves around work, family, sex, drinking, and death. In the book, there is a series of epitaphs.

\* \* \*

Дамба. Клумба. Облезлая липа.  
Дом барачного типа.  
Коридор. Восемнадцать квартир.  
На стенке лозунг: МИРУ - МИР!  
Во дворе Иванов  
морит клопов, -  
он - бухгалтер Гознака.  
У Макаровых пьянка.  
У Барановых драка.

\*

A dam, a flower bed, a shabby linden tree.  
The house is of barracks type.  
A corridor. Eighteen apartments.  
A slogan on the wall, "Peace to World!"  
In the courtyard Ivanov



Is exterminating bedbugs  
He is Goznak's accountant.  
There's a drinking party at the Makarovs.  
And a fight at the Baranovs.

The wonderful characteristic of this poem is the anaphoric rhyming, "damba" and "dom ba", as well as alteration of vowels a, u and o (damba-klumba-dom ba).

\* \* \*

Я в милиции конной служу,  
За порядком в столице слежу,  
И приятно на площади мне  
Красоваться на сытом коне.

\*

I serve in mounted militia,  
I supervise order in the capital city,  
It is fun for me  
To show off in the square on a well-fed horse.

\* \* \*

Пивная, как кабак.  
Ругаются матом,  
Курят табак,  
Дышат спиртным перегаром.  
Пей,  
Деньги достались даром,  
Загнал шины  
С машины.  
Пропивается кирпич,  
Доски,  
Выявляются тёзки,  
Наживаются миокардиты,  
Размножаются бандиты.

\*

A brewery is like a pub.  
All speak in obscenities,  
Smoke tobacco,  
Breathe out alcohol.  
Drink,  
Money came easy  
You sold tires  
Off your truck  
They drink away bricks,  
Planks,  
Find their namesakes,  
Acquire myocarditis,  
Breed bandits.

\* \* \*

Он и она в кино.  
Им не до кино:  
Идет спор,  
Начатый где-то  
Разговор.  
Он шипит:  
"Желаю тебе добра..."  
На экране рявкнули  
Уррра!

\*

He and she at the movies  
They don't care about the movies  
They argue  
It started somewhere  
Their conversation  
He hisses  
"I wish you well..."  
On the screen they bellowed  
Hurray!

\* \* \*

Здесь зарыто Марусино тело.  
Замуж не выходила,  
Говорят, не хотела.  
Сделала 22 аборта.  
К концу жизни была похожа на чёрта.

\*

Here Marusya's body is buried  
She didn't marry,  
They say she didn't want to.  
She had 22 abortions.  
And at the end of her life looked like the devil.

Along with the epic component, Kholin's poems are also lyrical. Here is a poem that reminds me of Charles Bukowski:

### **Знакомство**

Началось с флирта  
При покупке торта  
Скорчил морду  
Вроде черта  
Она не осталась в долгу  
Сказала  
Могу  
Съесть 10 пирожных  
Не запивая водой  
Невозможно  
Это искусство  
Провожал домой  
Говорили об искусстве  
Любишь  
Соловьева-Седова  
Да  
Балет  
Нет  
Ерунда  
Бред

Опера  
СВИНСТВО  
Симфония  
Хамство  
Завязалось  
Знакомство

### **Acquaintance**

It started with flirting  
At the bakery where they bought a cake  
He grimaced  
Like a devil  
She paid him with the same  
She said  
I can eat 10 cakes  
Without water  
It's impossible  
It's an art  
He saw her to the house  
They talked about art  
Do you love Soloviev-Sedov  
Yes  
Ballet  
No  
Nonsense  
Rubbish  
Opera  
Beastliness  
Symphony  
Rudeness  
They got  
Acquainted

The next book by Kholin that came out, also in Samizdat, was entitled "Cosmic Poems" and came as a response to the popular infatuation with science fiction caused by the success of the Russian space program. The action in these poems takes place in the future, where the features of totalitarian presence are still preserved.

\* \* \*

Камера  
Инженера Крамера  
В ней  
Идет обработка людей  
В смысле  
Единства идей  
Тук  
Тук  
Тук  
Работает ультразвук  
У Нилина  
Лишняя извилина  
Жилину  
Добавить извилину

\*

A camera  
of engineer Kramer  
In it  
People are transformed  
Acquiring the uniformity  
Of ideas  
Tuk  
Tuk  
Tuk  
Ultrasound is working  
Nilin  
Has an extra gyrus  
Zhilin  
Is in need of an extra gyrus

\* \* \*

Акт  
Обследования Венеры  
а) Планета населена  
Животными

Крупного размера  
б) Труд  
Тут  
Является делом  
Низшего класса  
Пригодного  
Только на мясо  
в) Бронтозавры  
Делят  
Руководящие лавры

\*

Act of investigation of Venus  
a) The planet is inhabited with animals  
Of big size  
b) Labor  
Here  
Is a thing of the working class  
They also serve as meat  
3) Brontosaurus  
Share  
The laurels and the thrones

As Kholin's poetry was developing further, the tendencies toward the grotesque and absurd increased, while on the other hand he continued to write lyrical poetry where feelings were expressed but with a characteristic stoic reserve.

\* \* \*

Траурная  
Процессия  
Одним грустно  
Другим весело  
Несут крюк  
Хоронят крюк  
Заступ стук  
Крюку каюк

\*

A funerary procession  
Some are happy  
Some are sad  
They are carrying a hook  
They are burying a hook  
Spade knock  
Hook is finished

\* \* \*

У Холина  
Рога на поясице  
Вы что  
Хотите в этом  
Убедиться  
Внимание  
Снимаю брюки  
Прочь руки  
Суки

\*

Kholin  
Has horns  
On his lower back  
Do you want  
To see yourselves  
Attention  
I am taking my pants down  
Hands off  
Bitches

\* \* \*

Если ты одинок,  
Если тебе не с кем поговорить  
Зайди  
К самому себе  
Поговори

Сам с собой

\*

If you are lonely  
If you have no one  
To talk to –  
Why not  
Visit  
And try to talk  
To yourself?

Translated by Anatolii Kudriavitskii

I would like to point out the poems about war memories. Igor Sergeevich often said in Soviet literature there is no truth about the war. He himself tried to fill in the gaps with his unprintable poems.

\* \* \*

Командир батареи  
Безусый  
Парнишка  
Рассматривал в бинокль  
Поле  
Утыканное  
Ромашками  
И васильками  
Затем  
Вдохнул  
Полной грудью  
Окопную вонь  
Крикнул  
Огооонь  
И все полетело  
Вверх тормашками

\*



The gun-commander  
a young lad  
wearing no moustache  
used his field glass  
to examine the field

all about were dotted  
daisies and cornflowers

the lad breathed in  
the trench stink  
and screamed:  
Fire!

topsy-turvyness  
the world is in a mess

\* \* \*

Ни звезды  
Ни креста  
Ни черта  
Волосы  
Вместо травы  
Торчат  
Из земли  
На братской могиле

### **Common Grave**

No stars  
No crosses  
No nothing

Instead of grass  
Hair  
Sticks  
Out of the ground  
At the common grave

Translated by Anatolii Kudriavitskii

In 1974 there was a turning point in Kholin's life. The woman he loved died in childbirth. Kholin stopped writing and participating in the literary life and devoted his time to raising his daughter, Arina. Kholin continued to write after 1991 when Arina graduated from high school. Arina is a famous writer and journalist now. Kholin died in Moscow on June 15, 1999.

\* \* \*

Вы слышите звуки  
Разлуки  
Холин  
Кончается  
Впрочем  
Кто его знает  
Всякое с ним бывает  
Может он не кончается  
Может он  
Оживает

\*

Do you hear  
The sounds of parting  
Kholin  
Is dying  
Although who knows  
Anything can happen to him  
Maybe he is not dying  
Maybe he is reviving

Translated by Julia Nemirovskaya (unless otherwise stated)

\*Игорь Холин. Избранное. Стихи и поэмы. — М.: Новое литературное обозрение, 1999.

## IAN SATUNOVSKII

Lianozovo Group (or Lianozovo School) now includes the name of Ian Satunovskii. Yet his position in the group is quite special. He was not a student of Kropivnitskii. His poetry was formed under the influence of Futurists and Constructivists. Ian Satunovskii met the Lianozovo Group in 1961, when he was a middle-aged man and a mature poet. But this meeting came out to be very fruitful for him. It began a new period of his work, and in the following two decades, he wrote most of his poems.

During his lifetime in the USSR only his children's poems were published. From 1977, his poems came out by Tamizdat. The first book of selected verse came out in 1992, and in 2012 the most complete and reliable collection of Satunovskii's poems was published. I prepared the publication of both books. In the 2012 book, 1300 texts were included.

Iakov Abramovich was born in Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine) on February 10 (23) of 1913. After graduating from a seven year school in the end of the 1920s, he studied at a technical school in Moscow where he attended literary readings and apparently met the members of the Union of More or Less Equal People (ESPERO), Obolduev and Pulkin. Upon return to Dnepropetrovsk he worked for a while, then in 1933 entered Dnepropetrovsk University's chemistry department. He graduated in 1938. Before the beginning of the World War 2, he worked as a scholar-engineer at the NII (Scientific Research Institute) in Dnepropetrovsk and published scholarly papers.

In the beginning of the war, Satunovskii was in the combat as a commander of a communication unit of the artillery division. In March of 1942 he was badly wounded and, after treatment, was sent to the editorial board of the 5th Guards Army "Patriot of the Motherland" newspaper. Stalingrad, Kursko-Belogorodskaia arc, Ukraine, Poland, Dresden, and Prague -- these were the stages of the army's road and of Satunovskii, as well. In the newspaper, he did art but also sometimes wrote poems.

After the war, Satunovskii moved to the town of Elektrostal near Moscow, where he worked at a Scientific Research Institute until he retired in 1967.

But besides his scientific biography there was also a literary biography, a life in literature. Poems before 1938 were lost. The author mentioned his first good poem—written in 1938:

\* \* \*

У часового я спросил:

— скажите, можно ходить по плотине?

— Идись! — ответил часовой  
и сплюнул за перила.

Сняв шляпу,  
я прошёл  
по плотине, овеянной славой,  
с левого берега  
на правый  
и статью из Конституции прочёл.

Так вот он, Днепрострой!  
Я вижу  
символ овеществлённого труда,  
а подо мной стоит вода  
с одной стороны выше,  
с другой стороны ниже.

\*

I asked the sentry:  
tell me, is it possible to walk along the dam?  
"Gaw 'head!" answered the guard  
and he spit over the rail.

Taking off my hat,  
I walked  
along the dam, which was covered with glory,  
from the left bank  
to the right  
and read an article from the Constitution.

So there it is, Dneprostroi.  
I see  
a symbol of materialized labor,  
while below me stands the water,  
on one side higher,  
on the other side lower.

Translated by Gerald Janecek

This poem, on the one hand, is an implementation of the Constructivism program --- or, more exactly, is like a draft, a picture of a huge technological structure. But the focus is different: the poem is focused on the narrator, his insecurity, surprise, and impression.

That is, Satunovskii was looking for some new quality, and, finally, found it. In a poem of 1939 it is expressed even more distinctly:

\* \* \*

Вчера, опаздывая на работу,  
я встретил женщину, ползавшую по льду,  
и поднял её, а потом подумал: — Ду-  
рак, а вдруг она враг народа?

Вдруг! — а вдруг наоборот?  
Вдруг она друг? Или, как сказать, обыватель?  
Обыкновенная старуха на вате,  
шут её разберёт.

\*

Yesterday, when I was late to work and rushing,  
I met a woman crawling on ice  
And lifted her up and then thought: a fool,  
what if she is an enemy of the people?

What if! And what if vice versa?  
What if she is a friend? Or, so to say, a wimp?  
An ordinary old woman, cotton wool covering her limb,  
who the hell can tell?

Translated by Julia Nemirovskaya

Ambiguous subjectivity: the first impulse is to help the old woman, the second impulse is to recall the Soviet "What if he/she is an enemy of the people?" - -- and, ultimately, a refusal to harbor an univocal attitude.

It's a depiction of one's consciousness.

Before meeting Lianozovo Group poets Satunovskii wrote many wonderful poems.

During the war:

\* \* \*

Мама, мама,  
когда мы будем дома?  
Когда мы увидим  
наш дорогой плебейский двор  
и услышим  
соседей наших разговор:

— Боже, мы так боялись,  
мы так бежали,  
а вы?

— А мы жили в Андижане,  
а вы?

— А мы были в Сибири,  
а вы?

— А нас убили.

Мама,  
так хочется уже быть дома,  
чтоб всё, что было, прошло,  
и чтоб всё было хорошо.

\*

Mother, mother,  
When will we be home?  
When we see  
Our dear plebeian yard  
And hear our neighbors talk:

- Gosh, we were so afraid  
we ran away,  
and you?

- And we lived in Andizhan  
and you?

- And we were in Siberia,  
and you?  
- And we were killed.

Mam,  
I so much want to be home  
so that all that was in the past passed  
and so that all is well at last.

Translated by Julia Nemirovskaya

\* \* \*

Сейчас, не очень далеко от нас,  
идет такое дикое кровопролитье,  
что мы не смотрим друг другу в глаза.  
У всех - геморроидальный цвет лица.  
Глощают соду интенданты.  
Трезвеют лейтенанты.  
И все молчат.

Всё  
утро  
было,  
а сейчас -  
всё  
смогло.

Молча,  
разиня рот,  
облившись потом,  
молча  
пошла, пошла, пошла пехота,  
пошла, родимая...

1944

\*

This moment, not far from here,

such an orgy of bloodshed is taking place  
that we won't look each other in the face.  
Everyone has got a hemorrhoidal complexion.  
Quartermasters are swallowing baking soda.  
The lieutenants are turning sober.  
And everybody's silent.  
All  
morning  
it thundered.  
And now it's fallen silent.  
Silently,  
with open mouths,  
drenched in sweat,  
in silence,  
There it goes, there it goes, there it goes, the infantry, there it goes, the dear  
mamma...

1944

After the war:

\* \* \*

Я хорошо, я плохо жил,  
и мне подумалось сегодня,  
что, может, я и заслужил  
благословение Господне.

1959

\*

I lived well, ill I lived  
and had the thought today  
that I may have deserved  
God's blessing anyway.

But before meeting Kholin and Sapgir in 1961, Satunovskii, it seems, was not sure about his literary path and his life in general. He oscillated between science and poetry, between the official status of a Soviet poet and writing poetry



"for himself." These people (and also Nekrasov) learned the main lesson taught to them by Evgenii Kropivnitskii, the lesson of freedom: you can write poetry outside the Soviet literature.

And they became Satunovskii's friends. This was how the Lianozovo Group became complete.

Satunovskii dedicated to Kholin his programmatic poem in prose, "A Review of Poems by Igor Kholin, 1968":

Холин искал себя на Марсе, а нашёл в Марьиной роще, когда хоронили  
Александра Давыдовича, отца Киры Сапгир.  
Что значит — поэт нашёл себя?  
Когда-то Флобер сказал: Эмма — это я.  
Поэту среднему достаточно, чтобы читатель узнавал: это Холин.  
Большому поэту надо, чтобы читатель узнал: Холин — это я.  
Тогда стихи перестают быть предметом эстетической оценки,  
например,  
любования: «ах, как это здорово сделано», или «как это ново», или «как  
интересно », а становятся религией последних дней человечества.

### **A Review of Igor Kholin's Long Poems of 1968**

Kholin sought himself on Mars, but found himself in Maryina Roscha, when they were burying Kira Sapgir's father.

What does it mean that a poet "has found himself?"

Flaubert said once: "Emma - c'est moi."

For a mediocre poet, it's enough if a reader recognizes: "This is Kholin."

For a greater poet, it is necessary that the reader should recognize:

"Kholin, that's me".

Then the poems are no longer an object of aesthetic judgment: for example, of admiration: "ah, how deft," or, "how new," or, "how interesting"; but become the religion of humanity's last few days.

And here are the poem dedicated to Nekrasov:

\* \* \*

Поговорим с тобой  
как магнитофон с магнитофоном,  
лихая душа,  
Некрасов Николаевич Всеволод,

русский японец.

1970

\*

Let's talk,  
tape-recorder to tape-recorder,  
wild soul,  
Nekrasov Nikolaevich Vsevolod,  
a Japanese Russian.

I will recite some poems that are self-evident as a precise description of  
life in the USSR:

\* \* \*

Все думают одно и то же,  
и говорят одно и то же,  
но говорят одно,  
а думают другое.

1964

\*

Everybody's thinking the same thing.  
Everybody's saying the same thing.  
But they say one thing  
And think another.

The author doesn't have any pity for himself or the intellectuals who are like  
him:

\* \* \*

Я - трус, трус, трус  
(написать на листке бумаги);  
я - гнусный трус  
(и забыть изорвать, забыть

утопить в унитазе!).

1965

\*

I am a coward, coward, coward  
(write that on a piece of paper),  
I am a stinking coward  
(and forget about it, forget to rip it up,  
to drown it in the toilet)

Слабость, как залог человечности:  
Here is an example of depicting weakness as a pledge of humanity:

\* \* \*

Все мы смертны, господа следователи преследователи.  
Стоя в гробу - что я могу  
во имя существительное,  
прилагательное,  
глагол?  
Извините, что я старый.

1969

\*

We all are mortal, gentlemen investigators inquisitors.  
Standing in my grave - what can I,  
in the name of the nominative,  
accusative,  
vocative?  
Forgive me for being old.

Творческая проблема:

In this poem, he depicts problems with creativity:

\* \* \*

...а, впрочем,  
не всё ли нам равно - писать - свободным  
или каким-нибудь ещё - стихом  
в концентрационном лагере...

1972

\*

...Actually,  
do we care - whether to write - free  
or some other kind of - verse  
in concentration camp?

Итоговое размышление (в одну строчку):

He summarizes his thoughts in a just one-line poem:

\* \* \*

Да, сны доказывают, что я жил среди людей.

1975

\*

Yes, dreams are the proof that I have lived among people.

Стихи про осень:

Poems about fall:

\* \* \*

Листья падают,  
листья падают,  
просто так,  
Христа ради...

1975

\*

Leaves are falling,  
leaves are falling,  
just so, just  
in the name of the Lord.

Из последних стихов:

\* \* \*

Господи, ад и рай!  
Господи, я твой раб!  
Разные на земле цветы,  
в марте мимоза это ты.  
Господи, не погуби, смилуйся!  
Господи, погоди...

1980

\*

Lord, heaven and hell!  
Lord, I am your humble help, your slave!  
Flowers of the Earth that ever grew,  
the March mimosa is You.  
Lordie, have mercy, save!  
Lordie, hold on a few...

Translated by Nika Skandiaka (unless otherwise stated)

VSEVOLOD NEKRASOV

Vsevolod Nikolaevich Nekrasov was born in Moscow on March 24, 1934. During World War II, he was evacuated to Kazan. In 1944 his father died, and in 1947 he lost his mother. Nekrasov lived with his aunt, his mother's sister, in Mariupol, Ukraine. He studied at the Moscow City Pedagogical Institute, which

was named for Potemkin, at the Department of Philology. There, he met the poet Mikhail Sokovnin and they remained friends until Sokovnin's death in 1975 (I compiled and published two books by him in 1995 and 2012).

Nekrasov began writing poetry in his student years in Moscow. In 1959, together with Kholin and Sapgir, he participated in the first well-known samizdat literary project and contributed to their journal "Sintaksis" ("The Syntax"). Nekrasov became closer to Kholin and Sapgir. He frequently visited artist Oscar Rabin in Lianozovo. In 1965 Nekrasov started publishing his works abroad in tamizdat format (published "over there"). Some of his works were published in his country in 1988. Nekrasov had several books published during his lifetime. He could have had more books and articles published if he had not taken such an uncompromising position. At the beginning of XXI century, one could hear many voices calling him the greatest poet of modern Russia.

Vsevolod Nekrasov died on 15 May 2009, at the age of 75.

When Vsevolod Nekrasov came to Lianozovo, his poetic techniques were already formed under the influence of the outstanding poet Nikolai Glazkov (1919-1979). Glazkov himself was then an unprintable poet, and he introduced the term "samsebyaizdat" (self-publishing house or self-publisher). Nekrasov's evolution and growth as a poet occurred in tandem with the emergence and development of Moscow conceptualism in the late 1960s and 1970s. Nekrasov's poetry is the knot that ties minimalism, concretism, and conceptualism together.

In 1971, I read Nekrasov's samizdat collection, compiled by Nikolai Bokov, upon the recommendation of my poet friend, Mikhail Fainerman. The compilation of Nekrasov's poems helped me perceive the existence of a contemporary Russian poetry. At that very time, Venedikt Erofeev's novel "Moskva-Petushki" ("Moscow to the End of the Line") proved the existence of contemporary Russian prose, as well.

In the early 1980s, I prepared a samizdat (self-published) compilation of poems at the request of Vsevolod Nikolaevich Nekrasov. I used a typewriter to reproduce his poems on very thin A4 paper, which I then divided into four pages. I stacked the printed papers into a box of Gerkules (Hercules) oatmeal, which was just the right size for the paper. They called this set of poems that I had compiled "Gerkules." In 2012, "Gerkules" was released as "Poems 1956-1983." The new edition includes the latest changes made by Nekrasov.

Nekrasov acknowledged and blessed my digital publication of his selected works in 1998, which can be accessed via <http://www.vavilon.ru/texts/prim/nekrasov1.html> .

Сам Некрасов таким образом обозначает свой статус в русской поэзии:

Thus, Nekrasov himself determines his place in Russian poetry.

\* \* \*

Товарищи  
товарищи

слова-то  
ваши

ваши все слова

были

а стали мои

вот

и стихи мои  
будут вашими

ХОТИТЕ ЛИ ВЫ ТОГО  
ИЛИ ВЫ  
НЕ ТОГО  
НЕ ХОТИТЕ

\*

Comrades  
comrades

these words are  
yours

all the words are yours

were yours

but now mine came

so

and my poems  
will be yours

whether you like it  
or you  
don't  
like it

and:

\* \* \*

какой  
я Пушкин

я кто  
Некрасов

не тот Некрасов  
и еще раз не тот

не хвастаюсь я  
а хочу сказать

с вас  
и такого хватит

Here is one of his early poems associated with his wartime memories:



## **И я про космическое**

Полечу или нет - не знаю  
До луны или до звезды  
Но луну я пробовал на язык  
В сорок первом году в Казани

затемнение  
война  
тем не менее  
луна

белый  
свет

белый  
снег

белый  
хлеб  
которого нет

никакого нет

Я давным-давно вернулся в Москву  
Я почти каждый день обедаю

А на вид луна была вкусная  
А на вкус луна была белая

## **And I, Too, Will Speak of the Cosmic**

Will I fly or not, I can't tell  
To the moon or to a star  
But the moon I tasted on my tongue  
In Kazan' in '41

darkness  
war  
nevertheless  
moon

white  
glow

white  
snow

white  
bread  
there is no

no bread at all

I have long since returned to Moscow  
And I dine almost every night  
But the moon looked like it tasted good  
And the moon tasted white

\*\*\*

In a later poem, he recapitulates the horrors of the war and the communist rule:

Даровая моя  
Больница  
Дорогая моя  
Война

Моя  
Больная мама

Идет война голодная

Большая яма  
Больше чем я

Великая Отечественная  
Война Иосифовна

Война  
Ой воняла

Иосифовна  
Родная страна

Я не думаю  
Что я все это пройду  
Снова

Даже если ты и скажешь мне  
Слово

Даже если ты и скажешь мне  
Слово БАМ

Даже если ты и скажешь мне  
Слово БАМ

И амба

In one of his most famous poems, Nekrasov uses the simplicity of a verse to refute totalitarianism and denounce demagoguery:

свобода есть  
свобода есть  
свобода есть  
свобода есть  
свобода есть  
свобода есть  
свобода есть свобода

1964

\*

freedom is  
freedom is  
freedom is  
freedom is  
freedom is  
freedom is  
freedom is freedom

\*\*\*

More poems by Nekrasov:

Ночью  
очень чудно

Ночью  
очень чудно

Но ничего

\*

It's very strange  
at night

It's very strange  
at night

But it's alright

\* \* \*

речь  
ночью

МОЖНО ТАК СКАЗАТЬ

речь  
как она есть

иначе говоря

речь  
чего она хочет

\*

speech  
at night

it could be said  
speech  
as it is

in other words  
speech  
what does it want

\* \* \*

Ночью вода  
Ночью вода  
Ночью вода  
Ночью вода

Ночью вода  
Ночью вода  
Ночью вода  
Ночью вода

\*

Night water  
Night water  
Night water  
Night water

Night water  
Night water  
Night water  
Night water

\* \* \*

Месяц месяц  
Месяц месяц  
Месяц месяц  
Месяц месяц

Как ты висишь

Кто так висит  
Как ты висишь

Разве так висят

\*

Moon moon  
Moon moon  
Moon moon  
Moon moon

The way you hang  
Who hangs like that

The way you hang

Is that a way to hang

\* \* \*

Погоди

Я посмотрю

Как идут  
Облака

Как идут дела

\*

Hold on

I'll take a look at

the clouds  
moving along

how things are moving along

\* \* \*

Что делать

Что говорить

Как сказать

\*

What can be done

What can be said

How to say it

\* \* \*

ничего не сделал  
ничего не успел

залез на дерево  
и слез с дерева

\*

didn't do anything  
didn't finish anything

climbed up a tree  
then climbed down a tree

\* \* \*

что ли бы ты помог  
Бог

а я  
что я



что могу  
делаю

видишь  
я свечку ставлю

\*

and like you would help  
God

and me  
what about me

I do  
what I can

see  
I'm lighting a candle

Translated by Ainsley Morse & Bela Shayevich