

## MINIMALISM IN RUSSIAN POETRY

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Minimalism is a school of poetry based on Dao and the principle of minimal action discovered by Maupertuis in the 18th century. There is an analogous teaching in Russia, by Serafim of Sarov, that is called the “acquiring of grace.” Inaction, or minimal action, is not disturbing the flow of events and is in fact the most effective action.

Language is the Dao of a poet

Poetry is the Dao of the language.

I believe in Russian poetry, the perfect example of Wu wei is the following poem by Vsevolod Nekrasov,

Wait,

I'll see

How the clouds are moving

How things are moving along.

The emergence of Russian minimalism is parallel to the European minimalist movement but it is enriched by our specific disappointments.

When we realized that we walked into the wrong direction.

In early 20th century, Platonov wrote about it in “Chevengur.”

“People began to act too early without having understood too much. They ought to, whenever possible, keep their actions low to give free rein to the contemplative part of their soul.

Contemplation is education via other people’s experience. Let people take as long as possible to learn the circumstances of nature and begin to act later in their lives, but without mistakes, solidly and armed with mature experience... It will suffice to leave history alone for 50 years for everyone to reach a blissful life.“ (One cannot fail to notice the irony in the end.)

Yevgenii Kropivnitsky was the first (1893-1979) to realize that.

[POEM]

The rejection of lofty expressions, an effective structure, and a straightforward outlook all created the foundation of minimalism.

Naturally, this trend was completely outside the official Soviet culture. “Grandpa” Kropivnitsky showed his pupils that one can function artistically without noticing that culture. He entertained asceticism in life and poetry. His pupils were Kholin (1920-99) and Sapgir (1928-99) and later, in early 1960s, Nekrasov and Satunovsky. The minimalist stylistics was to a certain degree characteristic to all of these poets.

Do thunder

Thunder

Do pour

Downpour

Do bend

Tree

Do grow

Grass

All for my sake

[POEM]

This is Igor Kholin, whose exceptionally solid constructs remind of Daniil Kharms' formula: "Poems must be written so that if you throw them into the window the glass would break."

Yalta  
Train station waiting room  
Fight for peace  
Shattering everything  
Only the state plan, and the ashes of the TV sets.

Another feature of minimalist poetry is the rejection of the traditional poetic inertia.

The rhyme  
What a messy bastard  
Don't trust it, brother!

The development of the poetic style of Yan Satunovsky (1913-82) is very characteristic of the whole group. His poetics before he met Lianozovo school poets was Constructivist (similar to Russian constructivists Selvinsky, Ivan Aksenov, Yegor Obolduev and Ivan Pulkin).

The inmate was a Constructivist with New LEF tendencies  
Somehow without Mayakovsky one doesn't know how  
Inmate was inmate and by natural laws  
He was executed in Kolyma camps.

After 1961, Satunovsky's verses become shorter.

We were here in the fall,  
When everything was aflame  
When everything was a-banner.  
But for the winter forest  
Only ink and white construction paper are needed  
Only ink and white construction paper

Satunovsky's poetry became more contained, too.

The same devilish mess behind the fence  
The same, or not the same  
Goat  
Or cow  
And my aunt's speech (thissy-issy)  
But the lieutenant is not the same  
The other one was a mayor.

Vsevolod Nekrasov (1934-2009) was the most consistent and radical minimalist. As a result, he became a central figure of contemporary Russian poetry. "Nekrasov staged a revolution in Russian poetry, a totally bloodless one at that." (М. Айзенберг) Scholars do not exaggerate when they compare him to Derzhavin and Khlebnikov. Nekrasov wrote about the influence of Nikolai Glazkov (1919-79) on his poetry. Glazkov cultivated the "tiny poems." In general, the minimalistic approach to poetry implies the maximum breadth of themes, both eternal and temporary.

Kremlin kremlin

Nerl Nerl (a Russian river)  
They were building on Nerl  
They had built on Nerl  
They died  
And we  
I don't remember.

One samizdat reader defined the effect of these poems as “cleansing the subconscious.”

The irony has an ability to annihilate the oppressive system.

It is good ecology. And, of course, the refusal to accept the evil. It is the literature that doesn't create any noise. “The speech what it wants,” according to an expression of the abovementioned Nekrasov. (This is predominantly the inner speech.)

Leonid Vinogradov (1936-2004), a consistent and original minimalist, represents Leningrad school of this poetry. Уже в конце 50-х он делал маленькие книжечки, составленные из моностихов. Только в конце 90-х его книги начали выходить типографским способом.

Москва. Метель.  
Скрип петель.  
Москва. Отель.  
Вид оттель.

Нельзя не вспомнить также Олега Григорьева (1943 - 1992). His work has an oral-speech democratic character. No wonder some of his poems became part of the Russian “city folklore.” For him, reaching the artistic effect by highly minimalistic means was a kind of elegant show-off.

I'll go home and complain to my mama  
That the moon is squeezed by two houses  
Of its drama

Or

When are you going to be back, asked my mother.  
“When there'd be fewer people pushing one another.”

The venous crowds of the suburbs.

Daniil Kharms suggested that there would be a way for life to conquer death. The question remains open.

Christ is risen  
Truly He is risen  
The statement is still in need of a proof