

Transnational Russian Studies

14-16 Sep 2017, Durham

Panel 1: Beyond Nation and Empire

Olga **Maiorova**, University of Michigan

The Empire Strikes East: Russia's Literary Colonisation of Central Asia

The paper focuses on the issue of how Russian culture spilled over into Central Asia following the piecemeal conquest of the region (1865-1890s). It explores how Russian literature 'travelled' to Turkestan and how Russia's cultural expansion into Central Asia developed through the largely understudied efforts of the Russian intelligentsia (journalists, scholars, engineers), who made Turkestan their home and who worked to re-imagine Russia's relation with its colonies and to introduce new cultural institutions in the region. As I try to demonstrate, those efforts took shape as the intelligentsia, quite paradoxically, tried to identify itself as an anti-colonial actor that opposed the policies of Russian authorities in the region (as well as the policies of the British Empire in India) and sought to pave new ways of cultural appropriation of foreign lands.

Amelia **Glaser**, University of California-San Diego

Transcultural Archetypes in the Literature of the Pale of Settlement

The Russian Empire's 'Pale of Settlement' – the territory to which Jews were confined between 1791 and 1917 – covered much of what is today Eastern and Central Ukraine. This culturally and linguistically diverse region was home to a number of ethnic groups, including Ukrainians, Jews, Tatars, Germans, Turks, and Russians. They spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and often came into conflict with one another. Focusing on examples of works by Nikolai Gogol, Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko and Sholem Abramovich (Mendele Moykher-Sforim), this paper will discuss three transcultural literary archetypes that appear in nineteenth-century Ukrainian, Russian, and Jewish fiction – the Ukrainian Cossack, the Moskal (Muscovite soldier), and the Jewish merchant. All three are also present as caricatures in traditional Ukrainian puppet theatre – Vertep. The paper shows how Jewish, Ukrainian, and Russian writers all used stereotypes promoted by their neighbours to define their own roles in Russia's ethnically diverse borderlands.

Panel 2: Between the Near and the Far Abroad

Kevin M. F. Platt, University of Pennsylvania

Russian Cultural Wholes and Fragments in the Baltic 'Near Abroad'

When the Soviet Union broke up, the Russians and Russian speakers of the Baltic region emigrated from what had been self-evidently Russian territory 'without leaving the comfort of their own homes'. As Vladimir Putin has repeatedly remarked of territories such as this, 'millions of Russians went to sleep in one country and woke up in another, as national minorities'. The complex task of fostering the linguistic and political integration of these populations in Baltic societies has loomed for the past two decades, and has more recently given way to concerns over the potential sympathies of these populations with the politics of the Kremlin. Yet it must also be recognized that Russians and Russian-speakers of this territory, and especially of its cosmopolitan centers, have long considered themselves as somehow distinct from Russians from Russia—as more a more 'cultured' and 'European' variety of Russians. Adding to this complex matrix of distinctions, in which culture and 'culturedness' play important roles, a new wave of Russians has begun to resettle in the Baltic, abandoning homes in the Russian Federation and bringing opposition and alternative political and media platforms with them. Riga is now home to a leading alternative news platform, *Meduza*, and the editor of a leading avant-garde Russian poetry journal, *Vozdukh*. This presentation, based on ethnographic field work and focusing on Russian self-descriptions, literature and media in the Baltic, illuminates the paradox of this situation, something of which is captured by the term that describes these territories in Russian: the 'Near Abroad'. Over the decades, the continued reach of media beyond the Russian Federation, cross-border networks, and international institutions that have grown up to bridge the geopolitical gap and inculcate a conception of the 'Russian cultural whole', largely with the help of the Russian state (such as the Russian World Foundation, the Moscow House in Riga, the Russian Prize for Russian literature written abroad, etc.) have all contributed to ensure that this territory remains 'near' to Russia: this is, after all, still a shared, contiguous geography. These dimensions of proximity ensure that the identities and politics of Russians in these territories are still closely linked to those of the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, the Baltic is separated by political borders from metropolitan Russian society, included in political unions (the EU) and defense treaties (NATO) that exclude Moscow, and its institutional culture shares more and more with that of Western Europe. Most importantly, Russians and Russian-speakers in this territory pride themselves on a distinctively 'cultured' status. Russians in Riga, in this sense, could not be farther 'abroad'. Indeed, some cultural actors, such as the Riga-based multimedia art and poetry group Orbita, are dedicated to construction of a distinct cultural location, an 'insular' form of Russianness predicated on distance from the Russian 'mainland'. As this presentation will demonstrate, to be Russian in the Baltic Near Abroad is to have political, social and cultural borders inscribed across one's community, family and even oneself.

Lara **Ryazanova-Clarke**, University of Edinburgh

Знай наших: The Russophone World in the UK

The paper will begin by addressing the theoretical issues related to the contemporary vision of 'diaspora' in the globalising world and by discussing the emerging patterns of diasporic development of Russian speakers across the world. It will then proceed to the examination of case studies related to Russian diasporic networks in the UK, discussing them as a cultural nexus of 'global Russian' identity production. The Russian community in the UK appears to be fluid, open and multidirectional. Consequently, the process of Russian speakers' diasporisation also seems to have a multi-local provenance as the imagined community is constructed not only in the UK, but also with inputs from elsewhere, primarily the Russian Federation. How are the Russian speakers living in the UK imagined and represented in the artistic production of the mainland? What differences and similarities do these identities demonstrate compared to those produced by the members of the UK Russophone community themselves?

Panel 3: Translation across Borders

Sergey **Tyulenev**, Durham Uni. & Vitaly **Nuriev**, Institute of Linguistics, RAN

Sewing up the World Social System: Translation from/into Russian in the Socialist Camp

The paper examines translation flows between the USSR and the satellite socialist countries in Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. We conceptualise the socialist camp as forming a particular type of (transnational and multilingual) social system, held together, in part at least, by the maintenance of a particular kind of (explicitly or implicitly ideological) discourse that was expected to pervade the system seamlessly. Using data on translation flows recorded in UNESCO's Index Translationum, we will study the role that translation from and into Russian played (or was expected to play) in coordinating and integrating said system. Put differently, we will analyse how the discourse that held this system together (and which needs to be understood broadly to include, for instance, works of literature) was being shaped and maintained across national and linguistic borders, above all through translation between Russian, on the one hand, and the other languages of the Soviet bloc, on the other.

Cathy **McAteer**, University of Bristol

Bringing Books across Borders: Behind the Scenes at Penguin Classics

The paper examines Penguin's re-launch of the nineteenth-century Russian literary canon, applying the Bourdieu-inspired 'sociological turn' in translation studies as a medium for exploration. The collaboration between Penguin and the early corps of Penguin Russian Classic translators, in particular David Magarshack, provides a case study in the translingual revival of Russian literature during the mid-twentieth century. As a Russian-born, immigrant translator, committed to popularising Russia and Russian literature through the vehicle of translation, Magarshack himself embodies cultural and linguistic mobility, while his translations, marketed on a global scale by Penguin Books, exemplify literary transnationalism. The paper examines both the commercial and the lexical ways in which the Penguin Classics editorial team and Magarshack brought an accessible form of Russian literature to the mass lay Anglophone reader.

Panel 4: Russian Trans-literature

Marijeta **Bozovic**, Yale University

Translingual Russian Émigré Literature: The Peculiar Case of Vladimir Nabokov

Despite the controversy that he inspired, Nabokov has been acknowledged as the first among Russian-born literati to attain the stature of a world writer. An unconventional but influential cultural ambassador, he reimagined the international relevance of the Russian literary tradition as well as the stylistic possibilities of the late twentieth-century transnational novel. Russia's ever-liminal position both inside and outside of European culture proves in some sense an advantage; and Nabokov, a model for how other cultural producers might break into and decentre the networks of cultural capital that shape and define canons. The paper discusses how Nabokov managed to escape the marginal status of a Russian émigré writer to become, in the 1960s and 1970s, the most famous world writer alive; and moreover, how he managed to convince readers that the Russian literary tradition was not entirely marginal to European and American literatures. In this regard, he resembles less the other famous Russian émigré writers than the artists and musicians, who had an easier time translating their life's work to other shores.

Jeanne-Marie **Jackson**, Johns Hopkins University

Интеллигенция *Found and Lost: Ulitskaya's Daniel Stein, Interpreter as Global Philosophical Novel*

Ludmila Ulitskaya is no doubt a world writer, as her bevy of European literary awards attests. Despite her renown, both in Russia and the West, the most transnationally ambitious of her novels has, however, met with an underwhelming English-language reception. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, published in the US and Britain in 2011, has been criticised for its politically naïve religious content (namely its esoteric discussion of Jewish-Christian conversion), and its sprawling, disjointed plot structure. This paper argues that such disharmony between the novel's theological ideas and its geographical diffusion is precisely its achievement. Based on Ulitskaya's perceived failure to link themes of spiritual and intellectual connection to her novel's disconnective narrative form, I propose instead that *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* succeeds as an exemplar of an as-yet untheorised genre – the global philosophical novel. Ulitskaya, I suggest, seizes on the globally embattled terrain of Israel/Palestine to foreground a seemingly disjunctive philosophical temperament. In so doing, she emphasises the difficulty and necessity of the novel's tackling spatial contestation and intellectual systematisation side by side, unseating an unspoken division of labour in the contemporary novel between geographical range, on the one hand, and philosophical density, on the other.

Panel 5: Transnational Cinemas

Stephen M. **Norris**, Miami University

Russian Cinema Going West (and East): Fedor Bondarchuk's Stalingrad

Fedor Bondarchuk's 2013 film *Stalingrad* became the first domestic film to be made in IMAX 3D. It also broke Russian box-office records. Its format, marketing campaign, subject material, and distribution all encapsulate one of the most significant trends in post-Soviet cinema; namely, how Russian film has gone Hollywood. This paper traces these cinematic developments and debates about the new Russian cinema through a case study of Bondarchuk's blockbuster. The son of the famed Soviet director Sergei, Bondarchuk's first feature film about the Soviet-Afghan War, *Ninth Company*, played a starring role in the cinematic revival of the 2000s. With *Stalingrad*, Bondarchuk turned west not just to learn about filming in the IMAX 3D format, but also to sign an agreement with Sony Pictures to distribute the film and future films, even though this turn came at a time when President Vladimir Putin's speeches and official media became even more anti-West in tone (Bondarchuk himself has openly declared his admiration for Putin). The paper will explore this seeming paradox as an example of the ongoing transnational character of Russian cinema that goes back to the Soviet era, particularly the 1930s and 1970s. The paper closes with an overview on *Stalingrad's* success in China, where it became the first Russian film to lead the box office.

Dušan Radunović, Durham University

Transnationalism as Experience: The Case of Post-Soviet Cinema

This paper has a twofold goal: to establish general parameters for understanding the concept of ‘transnational cinema’ in the post-Soviet political and cultural space; and to explore specific manifestations of ‘transnationalism’ on examples of films (co-)produced in post-Soviet states over the past couple of decades. The chapter will, firstly, situate the study of post-Soviet cinemas within the emergent subfield of ‘transnational film studies’. It will highlight the benefits of exploring transnational relationships and interactions at different levels: film production (e.g., the underpinnings of joint financing and distribution of inter-state film projects); aesthetics (e.g., the emergence of transnational genres, narratives, chronotopes and stock characters); and politics (including nationalist, ‘post-colonialist’, and various ‘transnationalist’ ideologies characteristic of this geopolitical area). Secondly, the paper will develop an original argument concerning the importance of paying closer attention to the experiential, affective and emotive figurations of transnationalism in post-Soviet films. Two case-studies – Mikhail Kalatozishvili’s *Wild Field* [*Dikoe pole*], set in Kazakhstan, and George Ovashvili’s *The Other Bank* [*Gagma napiri*], set in Georgia (both produced in 2008) – will be analysed to demonstrate how in post-Soviet cinema the realm of everyday human experience and emotion emerges as a privileged locus of ‘transnationalism’ that is made to prevail over dominant political narratives.

Panel 6: Russian Trans-cultures

Ellen Rutten, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Russian Imperfections: On (Un-)translating and De-westernising Aesthetic Theory

In contemporary fashion, design, art, film, literature, psychology, marketing, and genetics, multiple experts and critics frame ‘the imperfect’ as asset rather than taboo. Makers of torn jeans, visitors of rickety-looking cafés, authors of ‘embrace-your-flaws’ self-help guides: they profess what one could call a cult of imperfection – one in which the non-polished is a hallmark for authenticity, wellbeing, or humanness. The present-day fascination for imperfection is an emphatically transnational phenomenon: practices that glorify the non-perfected and non-polished resonate across different world localities. Despite this transnational diversity, Anglophone analyses tend to present our complex attraction to imperfection as a homogeneously universal trend. In doing so, they often use Western concepts (such as ‘craft’, or ‘authenticity’) to discuss Western samples. In this paper, I plead against reading today’s preoccupation with the imperfect through Western lenses. I examine two Russian cultural objects – a home-crafted household item and a photograph by artist Boris Mikhailov – whose makers and users laud the imperfect. I propose to study these objects with a cosmopolitan concept-based methodology. This methodology (to paraphrase

Kwame Appiah and Mieke Bal, on whose thinking it builds) welcomes theoretical conversations across boundaries. It reckons with the values and beliefs that shape concrete local concepts. And it salutes the untranslatable – a term left untranslated ‘to write as it is transferred from language to language’ (Cassin).

Connor **Doak**, University of Bristol

Queer Eye for the Russian Guy? Writing about Sexuality in Russia

In her work on transnational sexualities, Jasbir Puar offers a critique of homonationalism, highlighting how western, neoliberal powers have come to utilise gay rights discourses in order to vilify the Other, often imagined as a primitive, homophobic fundamentalist in opposition to the enlightened, gay-friendly Westerner. Puar’s focus is on the Muslim world, yet her work also raises troubling questions for Slavists. When Westerners criticize the homophobic turn in contemporary Russia, the anti-gay laws, the self-consciously masculine rhetoric of Putin, are they too guilty of homonationalism? How far do contemporary representations of Russia, particularly in the media and popular culture, make use of the Othering that Puar describes? Moreover, as researchers and students of Russia, how can we acknowledge our own positionality as we navigate the ethical bind that faces us: the need, on the one hand, to offer a robust response to state-backed homophobia while also, on the other, recognising our own privilege as researchers and our possible complicity with a neoliberal agenda? This paper reflects on these theoretical questions through an examination of recent media coverage of homosexuality in Russia, including such BBC documentaries as *Stephen Fry: Out There* (2013) and Reggie Yates’ *Gay under Attack* (2015). I then turn to David Tuller’s travelogue *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia* (1996), a book that offers a different model for a transnational encounter between Russia and the West. Tuller confronts the problems of projecting Western concepts of sexuality onto Russia and imagines the country as a space for queer alternatives to emerge after the fall of the USSR.

Panel 7: Russia Going Global

Michael **Gorham**, University of Florida

Beyond a World with One Master: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Putin’s ‘Sovereign Internet’

Vladimir Putin’s 2007 speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy marked a turning point in his positioning of Russia in the global community. On the heels of his recently announced domestic policy of ‘sovereign democracy’, Putin made it clear that Russia would no longer be content operating under what he perceived to be a de facto unipolar world order, dominated by a single master or sovereign (the United States). It

would take another four years to germinate, but the notion of 'sovereignty' emerged in its most potent form in connection to the rapid spread of the internet and new media technologies, which, by virtue of their 'unipolar' (American-dominated) history and architecture, as well as their growingly influential role in Russian politics, had become a key battleground for symbolic authority both domestically and globally. After briefly exploring the early history of attitudes toward the internet in general and the Russian-language internet, or Ruset, in particular, the paper traces the emergence of Putin-era sovereignty-oriented rhetoric on the internet as a means of better understanding the underlying rationale for internet-related actions and policies, as well as broader visions of Russia's place in an increasingly networked global community. Particularly since the start of Putin's third presidential term in 2012, the notion of 'sovereignty' has assumed a central position in the Kremlin pronouncements and policies on new media, tending to manifest itself in one or a combination of three dominant forms: purist calls for the protection of the Russian population; statist concerns for centralized control to ensure national security; and more neo-liberal, democratic invocations of transparency, free markets, and multinational oversight. Rather than ideological confusion or cognitive dissonance, the hybrid nature of Russian state rhetoric on the internet and new media technologies more readily reflects a non-ideological pragmatism, grounded in a recognition of the push and pull of competing audiences, as well as strategic goals and interests. In fact, to a certain extent, the hybridity of discourses on the internet itself is not unique to Russia, developing countries and markets, or authoritarian regimes: rather, it is emblematic of the multifarious functions new media play in nearly all twenty-first century wired societies.

Stephen **Hutchings** & Vera **Tolz**, University of Manchester

Retweeting History: RT, the 1917 Revolution Anniversary and the Global Media Landscape

This paper will focus on contemporary Russia's primary international broadcaster, Russia Today (RT). It will emphasise the significance of RT's emergence, like that of the nation whose interests it is tasked with promoting, at the intersection of the new communications revolution and the end of the Soviet Union. Through a case study of the channel's current multimedia project designed to mark the anniversary of the 1917 Russian revolutions, the paper will trace RT's political and journalistic ethos, its audience strategies and its deployment of digital technologies. It will demonstrate how the 1917 anniversary project serves to negotiate the tension between (a) RT's role as the projector of a state with a profoundly contradictory attitude to Bolshevism, and (b) its reliance on cosmopolitan allegiances, tastes and sensibilities born of a transnational, networked media landscape in which the Revolution has universal currency as an icon of leftist mythology, a transformational world event and a tool for scrutinising current global crises. The paper argues that the project's key strategy (the creation of a gallery of key revolutionary figures, each with a fictional Twitter account) enables followers to engage in ludic explorations of

the complex interplay between past and present, national and transnational. It also allows RT to maintain an ironic distance from the debates it generates. We conclude by using the 1917 project to challenge conventional wisdom on RT's recent shift from a tool of Russian soft power to the naked instrument of an 'information war'.

Vitaly **Kazakov**, University of Manchester

Popular-Cultural Information War: Russian-Language Twitter Responses to the 2017 Kiev Eurovision Final

The Final of Eurovision 2017 in Kiev went beyond being a contest in popular culture that brings together musicians from across Europe to 'celebrate diversity'. Instead, it became a focal point of deep tensions within Russian-language communities in Russia, Ukraine, Europe, and other parts of the transnational Russian-speaking world, in relation to a multiplicity of political, social, and cultural issues. Social media platforms present a potent area in which the nuances of these tensions can be traced. Based on a qualitative analysis of a sample of tweets in the Russian language, collected between 12th and 14th May 2017, during the weekend of the Kiev Final, this paper will analyse some of the key debates emerging in Russian-language Twitter posts and conversations in reaction to this event. Of specific interest are tweets focused on issues of ethnic, national and linguistic identity, as well as those commenting on national hostilities and allegiances between audiences across the post-Soviet space and Europe more generally. The paper will consider the factors that contribute to, as well as hinder, the symbolic construction of the transnational Russian-speaking communication network as a single 'community'. The analysis will include an examination of correlations between the core focus of particular Twitter responses (namely, whether they are dealing with Eurovision as a musical contest or a political event) with demographic, geographic and language-use trends, exposing cases of convergence and divergence within and between Russian-speaking communities around the world.