



Periodical Studies: Why and How to Re-read East European Journals

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Nearly a decade ago, Sean Latham and Robert Scholes ambitiously proclaimed “The Rise of Periodical Studies” in the *PMLA*, the premier publication that institutionalizes new trends in literary and cultural studies. Latham and Scholes proposed a seemingly radical reorientation in the philological scholarship of magazines and journals: treat them as “autonomous objects of study” rather than just as “containers of discrete bits of information.”¹ And while this approach has provoked significant, if at times polemical response in English and American Studies, the Slavic and East European fields have remained surprisingly silent. Is the notion of periodical studies as a discrete field applicable to our work? Does it differ from the ways Slavists have been analyzing journals for decades? At “Decoding the Periodical,” a workshop at Princeton University in March 2015,² we explored these questions with participants from fields of history, art history, and literary studies. Our conclusion was an emphatic yes, that periodical studies does offer Slavic new methodological avenues that reveal the dynamism of our specific periodical culture.

The call to rethink how we read Russian and East European periodical literature is timely. For over two centuries, not only literary, but political, technological, and economic forces kept the thick journal in a position of influence over readers, critics, and scholars. While in recent decades, Slavists following the cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences have broadened their scope to include new material, their methods for engaging periodicals have largely gone unchanged. Considering the revolution in the production, distribution, and consumption of periodical literature brought about by digital publishing platforms and today’s global marketplace, new critical approaches are all the more urgent. Periodical studies brings to “traditional” historical-literary analysis the practices of book history and media studies, which offer a new language for discussing the creation, dissemination, and reception of literature. As Jon Stone pointed out in his presentation at our workshop, Slavic periodical studies is in fact a project of negotiating two academic discourses: a more philologically-oriented Russian approach with an American one that has stronger focus on material culture and new media.

The workshop participants were asked to engage with this new methodological territory for their works-in-progress talks. They read a set of pre-circulated articles from periodical studies scholarship outside Slavic posted on our blog, SEEPS (Slavic, East European and

Eurasian Periodical Studies).³ Attention to a magazine’s material and visual components – images, graphics, typography, page design, paper type – was particularly germane for scholars of the avant-garde. Meghan Forbes, for example, in her talk on Czech interwar magazines, demonstrated how a particular typographic aesthetic allowed the Devětsil group to transcend linguistic boundaries and impact the international discourse of modernism. Ksenia Nouril, who looked at early Soviet photography magazines, argued that nuanced strategies for laying out Alexander Rodchenko’s photos reveal how *Sovetskoe foto* – and early Stalinist culture more broadly – negotiated the legacy of modernism and formalism. Sarah Krive discussed how the juxtaposition of text and image was used in early Soviet journals to create verbal and visual caricatures of Silver Age poets, serving both entertainment and didactic purposes.

When approached as a cultural form and economic object, the journal reveals itself as a mediator between inclusivity and otherness, using various genre-specific affordances for attracting new audiences while maintaining a posture of exclusivity. Yelizaveta Raykhlina demonstrated this process at work in early 19th-century Russia, tracing the evolution of “middle-brow” culture through a rhetoric of producers, critics and consumers of journals *Severnaia pchela* and *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*. Later in the century, as Colleen Lucey pointed out, advancements in print technology allowed a proliferation of satirical journals and broadsheet weeklies that constructed spectatorship and visual pleasure through graphical representations of the social and sexual other, particularly prostitutes and courtesans. In interwar Czechoslovakia, as Karla Huebner showed, journals such as *Gentleman* could promote marginal social and sexual identities as a distinct ideal of a refined urban lifestyle.

Our discussion of periodicals across geographical and historical boundaries emphasized their core generic characteristics. Taking the periodical as an “autonomous objects of study” means exploring its unique traits such as periodicity, ephemerality, collective authorship, institutionalized readership, and continual and multiple print runs. Closely related are the concrete logistical challenges of conducting research on periodicals. It is barely feasible to read, absorb, and assess thousands of pages of one or multiple journals’ complete run. The “rise” of periodical studies has therefore been closely linked to the emergence of digital editions and the new methodologies of the digital humanities. Digital archives (such as the Princeton

Blue Mountain Project⁴ and Brown/Tulsa's Modernist Journals Project⁵) not only provide access, they can enable novel kinds of readings through text mining, computational analysis and data visualization. Alex Moshkin's presentation exemplified this approach: his network graphs of four Israeli-Russian journals - *Dvoetochie*, *Zerkalo*, *22* and *Ierusalimskii Zhurnal* - demonstrated how several hundred authors in this community expressed geographic and linguistic affiliation compared to the magazine's aesthetic and ideological position. But, as keynote speaker and art historian Nick Sawicky pointed out, as we create a rich digital corpus of images, texts and datasets of Slavic and East European journals, we must also be conscious of how our interpretive maneuvers adjust in the digital environment. In his talk, "Avant-Garde Fissures in the Modern Czech Art Press: Traces in the Printed and the Digital," Sawicky discussed the radicalization of Czech modern art periodicals *Volné směry* and *Umělecký měsíčník*, and showed how contemporary understandings of this historical event are mediated by the multiple forms of access to the periodical as an object of study: as printed original; as transcribed, translated, and anthologized text; and increasingly as digital facsimile.

The proliferation of magazines, journals and newspapers in the last two centuries, and their continued evolution in the digital age, makes the methods of peri-

odical studies particularly attractive for evaluating and re-evaluating modern Russian and East European society and culture. Following the success of our first meeting, we plan to keep fostering this community through the SEEPS website, which will be updated with information about relevant events and publications. We invite all interested members of ASEEES to visit our website and to contact us with any questions or ideas for collaboration.

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(Endnotes)

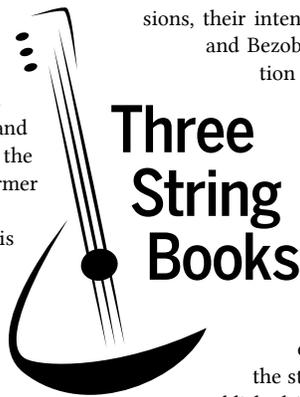
- 1 Latham, Sean, and Robert Scholes. "The Rise of Periodical Studies." *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006): 518.
- 2 For more information on the conference, including abstracts for the workshop presentations, see the SEEPS website: <https://seeeps.princeton.edu/>
- 3 See our website: <https://seeeps.princeton.edu>. A detailed bibliography can be found here: <https://seeeps.princeton.edu/sample-page/colloquium-readings/>
- 4 <http://bluemountain.princeton.edu/>
- 5 <http://modjournal.org/>

Slavica Publishers announces:

Slavica Publishers is delighted to announce the launch of its new imprint, Three String Books, devoted to translations of literary works from Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and the other successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Our first offering is Boris Poplavsky's *Apollon Bezobrazov*, translated by John M. Kopper.

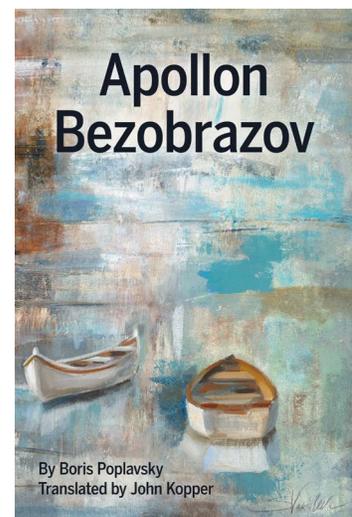
Apollon Bezobrazov is a novel by a "recovered Surrealist." Making an uncharacteristic detour into prose in the 1920s, the Russian émigré poet Boris Poplavsky presents a novel that both reveals and rebels against the Surrealist influence of prominent Parisian contemporaries like André Breton and Louis Aragon. The novel's eponymous hero embodies the figure of the urban hippie—the flâneur of French literature—while the narrator, a young Russian, falls under his spell. The story describes in colorful, poetic detail the hand-to-mouth existence of a small band of displaced Russians in Paris and Italy. It chronicles their poverty, their diver-



sions, their intensely played out love affairs, and Bezobrazov's gradual transformation in the eyes of his admiring followers. Abounding in allusions to Eastern religion, Western philosophy, and 19th-century Russian literature, the novel also features an experimental mixing of genres that echoes Joyce's *Ulysses*, while its use of extended metaphors reveals the stylistic impact of Proust. Not published in complete form in Russian until 1993, *Apollon Bezobrazov* significantly broadens our understanding of the literature of the interwar emigration.

John M. Kopper is Professor of Russian and Comparative Literature at Dartmouth College. He is the author of several articles on Poplavsky, and has published on Tolstoy, Gogol, Nabokov, and Bely.

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