Notes from the Virtual Untergrund.
Russian Literature on the Internet

Conceived by *Russian-cyberspace.org* (Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasyuk, Ellen Rutten, Robert Saunders, Henrike Schmidt, Vlad Strukov)

CAUGHT IN THE WEB? THE FATE OF RUSSIAN POETS IN THE INTERNET

Henrike Schmidt

The poet, writer and publicist Dmitri Bykov compares the Russian literary Internet to the stories and novels of Fyodor Dostoyevsky: 'In fact, it would be no great exaggeration to say that it was Fedor Mikhailovich who invented the Rulinet—the Russian literary Internet— 150 years before it actually appeared.'[1] Although Bykov admires the novelist's writing, the analogy is not intended as a compliment: it refers to the bored, cynical and malicious underground individual who is constantly involved in polemics against himself and others – characteristics that for Bykov are typical of the average Russian user and his cultural complexes and literary ambitions. At the same time, Bykov, a multimedia jack of all trades, is the embodiment of the contemporary literary entertainer: he is ubiquitous, not only in literature and on the television, but also in the Internet. Why? He answers that he likes to keep a type of *The Diary of a Writer*; many of the thoughts expressed spontaneously in the Internet are important for his novels, and a number of forum discussions were converted in their entirety into one of his books. The Net, therefore, is a place of polemical inspiration and a quarry for his own literary creation. Alongside these somewhat pragmatic motivations, Bykov confesses to have a peculiar and uncontrollable passion for the Internet: he reads certain texts and sites, and the majority of the forum discussions, with an 'an aesthetic, possibly even erotic, pleasure'.

This paradoxical, negative duality of identification with the literary culture of the Net is typical of a number of Russian writers. They polemicise against the medium in which 'programmers, housewives, New Russians, accountants and free-lance artists' pass judgement on texts. The professional writer entering the Web, says Bykov provocatively, must regret being born in 'the world's most well-read country'. The poet Igor Irtenev formulated the same conclusion more self-deprecatingly than polemically. His 'Corpse at his Laptop' does indeed describe the digital version of the underground individual quite well:

> The Poet's Fate
> I sit at the laptop day and night
> Stare at the screen, chew tobacco,
> I don't love anyone, I'm not nice to anyone
> Once I was a cheeky cossack, but now I'm a
>   sitting corpse.

For him, as for Bykov, there is no salvation from the ubiquity of the Net:

> There is a dot in space called .ru,
> I am caught here – for a long time and prob-
>   ably forever.
> I fear that I will snuff it at this dot.
> I fear that the end will come. If only I knew
>   when on the dot.

The lyrical dedication to the 'dot.ru' could be said to be symbolic of the Russian literati's relationship to the Internet, which alternates between feelings of oppression and passion as a new writing tool, a communication network, a rumour mill, a public space (albeit a distorted one).

The particular intensity of this relationship emanates from the past, from the specific situation facing Russia in the 1990s, during which the Internet was transformed from an exclusive mini-club to a mass medium. The Web's special significance for Russian literature stems from three factors: the social upheaval that brought about a normative and economic crisis in the state-run cultural infrastructure (publishing houses, sponsoring institutions and associations), the opening up of the country after decades of isolation and the ensuing re-crea-

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1 Within the 'community', the abbreviation 'RuNet' for the 'Russian Internet' and Rulinet for the 'Russian literary Internet' are popular. The lack of selectivity – sometimes it only includes domestic resources and sometimes foreign ones translated into Russian – has its roots in the Internet's global character.

editorial

tion of a common space of communication with the Russian literature of the diaspora, and the unique size of the country, which grants the Internet great importance as a medium for the regions. The result of these interlacing factors is the large number of texts and messages which also 'draw' those literati into the Net who , such as Bykov, have little in common with it aesthetically or normatively. The overwhelming majority of these texts are aesthetically conventional and do not exploit the Internet's full potential for poetics. ⇨HYPERTEXT and ⇨DIGITAL, ANIMATED POETRY are not *the* innovative genre of the new Internet literature. The aesthetic innovation came from other, completely unexpected quarters: the often obscene and politically incorrect virtual subcultures collectively created a new language, the jargon of the so-called 'good-for-nothings' (⇨PADONKI), which writers such as Viktor Pelevin and Vladimir Sorokin incorporate into their work. The mass ⇨DIGITAL FOLKLORE has yielded characters and narratives which have also infected the offline language of journalism, PR and politics.

Of course, the genres, authors and aesthetic forms presented in this edition of *kultura* cover only a small portion of the cultural activity on the Russian Internet. Alongside the pragmatic yet essential question of the availability of literature on the Web (⇨ELECTRONIC LIBRARIES and ⇨COPYRIGHT),

it presents the subversive deconstruction of the literary canon in ⇨INTERNET ART. It gives a portrait of the unavoidable LiveJournal, the Russian version of the globally successful ⇨BLOG. Lastly, the Russian-Ukrainian poet Alexander Kabakov answers questions on the significance of the world-wide-web for ⇨LOCAL POETIC MYTHOLOGY. Thus the grand master of literary dialogue, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, is not the worst choice of archetype for this type of aesthetic and ideological polyphony.

From the German by Christopher Gilley

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READING SUGGESTIONS:

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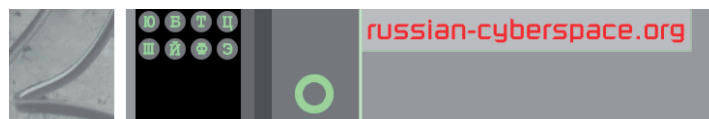
'Holy Cow' and 'Eternal Flame'. Russian Online Libraries

Henrike Schmidt

The old myth of Russian culture's literary rootedness lives on in the Internet. Although in the offline world there are complaints of sluggish sales and poor quality, the Web libraries are abundantly filled. These not only act as enormous repositories of texts, but also as meeting places for a readership spread throughout the world. This fact explains their symbolic status and their importance as a point of identification. However, the pressure on the Russian Internet libraries is growing: commercialisation and integration into the offline legal norms are changing the conditions in which they exist. Two tendencies are evident: the development of libraries that charge for their services alongside the retreat into copyright piracy.

analysis

Online Libraries as a National Cultural Asset?

> I am proud that the collections of books in the Russian internet are considerably larger than comparable online libraries in other countries. I am pleased by a further piece of evidence that, even in this electronic age, Russia remains a literary country, a country of the book. I like to think that the traditions of Soviet samizdat are alive and well today. Sergei Kuznetsov

Is the writer and publicist Sergei Kuznetsov's pride concerning the unique status of Russian electronic libraries justified? Or is the recourse to the myth of Russia as a country of readers simply a repetitive rhetorical gesture that falls back on uniqueness in response to the threat of cultural globalisation? In this light, the reference to the historical tradition of samizdat comes across as an attempt to ennoble digital self-publishing as a continuation of the struggle for intellectual freedom under the new conditions of capitalism.

It is indeed true that the Russian internet possesses an impressive number of websites offering literary texts and academic literature for free download. Most are private projects initiated by amateurs. The collections of texts reflect the individual tastes of their creators. In fact, the philologists Eugene Gorny and Konstantin Vigursky, themselves e-librarians, deny that many of the collections are actually libraries because they were not put together in a logical and consistent manner and do not possess the minimal requirements of bibliographical documentation. However, in the self-perception of RuNet, as the Russian segment of the internet is often called by its users, these projects perform the role of libraries.

The People's Librarian and his Holy Cow

One of the nuclei of Russian literature in the internet is the library run by programmer Maxim Moshkov (*http.//www.lib.ru*). Roman Leibov, the 'inventor' of Russian literary hypertext and an early cult figure among Russian bloggers himself, calls the site the 'holy cow of RuNet'. The library's description of itself gives an insight into the thematic hotchpotch that is an elementary dynamic of this collection, which attracts about 500,000 readers per month:

> The best-known www-library in RuNet opened in 1994. Writers and readers fill it every day. Belles lettres, fantastical writing and politics, technical literature and humour, history and poetry, singer-songwriters and Russian rock, travel and parachuting, philosophy and esotericism, etc., etc.

The focus on fantasy and science fiction is one of the last remaining traces of the *tekhnari* – the Russian programmers who created the first literary resources in the early 1990s for their own amusement, but have since been largely expelled from the internet.

The *Maxim Moshkov Library* is a classic case of a 'people's library' or library 'from below', which

analysis

is created in a similar manner to the English-language *Project Gutenberg* (http://www.gutenberg.org). In contrast, however, Moshkov not only has texts whose copyrights lapsed seventy years after the death of their authors, but also many works by contemporary writers.

Use of the library is free of charge. The books are chosen by the readers themselves, scanned and sent, ready for publication, to the library. In this way, it reflects the tastes of its readers: 'The readers determine the range and quality of the texts in this library; I simply stand here "at the reception"' says Moshkov. On the question of copyright, he holds a position that is more pragmatic than programmatic. A number of authors have given their express permission to publish their work in the www-library, including prominent writers such as Sergei Lukyanenko and Victor Pelevin. In all other cases, a policy of publication by recall is practised, whereby texts are promptly removed from the site if the author requests it; this accords with Moshkov's basic principle that 'the author's word is law'.

PHILOLOGICAL TREASURE TROVES. AVANT-GARDE AND THE CLASSICAL CANON

In contrast, the *Russian Virtual Library RVB* (*http://rvb.ru/*) created by Eugene Gorny, amongst others, in 1999 earns the label 'academic online library' by virtue of its decided interest in philology. It is also a private project. However, it is not only aimed at the broader reading public, but also at experts. Alongside classics such as those by Alexander Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Konstantin Batyushkov and Alexei Remisov, the repertoire is avant-garde and modernist. It publishes texts no longer subject to copyright. An exception is the 'Mystic of Moscow', Yuri Mamleyev, who expressly welcomes the publication of his work in the online library. The RVB, which has to make do with limited resources, has been funded by pub-

lic institutions such as the *Open Society Institute*[1] (1999–2001) and the *Russian Foundation for the Humanities* (2004–2009).

The *Fundamental Digital Library of Russian Literature and Folklore FEB* (*http://feb-web.ru/*) has set itself, as the name clearly suggests, a much larger task: Since going online in 2002, it has aimed to present the central texts from ten centuries of Russian literature and folklore. The collection is organised into Digital Scholarly Editions DSE, which can be devoted to a writer, a genre or a single work of significance to the history of literature. The choice of works recreates the canon, i.e. the texts handed down from generation to generation that form the country's cultural identity, for example the *Primary Chronicle*, the first account of Russian history from the 11th century. Although they are not yet complete, electronic editions of, amongst others, Pushkin, Alexander Griboyedov, Nikolai Lermontov and Sergei Yesenin are available.

The library project was founded by a non-profit foundation in which the *Institute for World Literature* of the *Russian Academy of Sciences* is involved. The supervisory board counts such prominent public figures as Mikhail Gorbachev among its members. Sponsors include, to name but a few, the *Russian Foundation for Basic Research*. The *Open Society Institute* provided sponsorship during the start-up period, as indeed it did for almost every internet project dealing with the humanities in Russia. Nevertheless, the library's director, Konstantin Vigursky, bemoaned in 2005 a general lack of funding: the money given as part of the *Electronic Russia* programme was insufficient and was not used effectively.

Vigursky and the editor in chief, Igor Pilshchikov, answer to the *FEB*'s readers via the guestbook. The forum provides, for example, a means of correcting typographical and factual errors. Here, too, the

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1 The foundation for the promotion of democracy and civil society founded by George Soros.

readers are involved in shaping the resource. As a result, they identify with the site strongly. The user Olga Frolova writes enthusiastically:

> First Acquaintances Thank goodness! I dropped in (by chance) and my life immediately became easier. This library is exactly what I have always dreamed about. Thanks!

Media Apostles vs. Moshkov. The Trial against *Lib.Ru*

'A lawsuit against the Moshkov library for the systematic infringement of copyright laws'; this quote from Alexei Andreyev's 1998 dystopian science fiction novel *The Spider's Web* turned out to be an eerily prophetic description of a dramatic turn of events in the real world. In 2004, right on time for the tenth anniversary of the .ru domain and Moshkov's internet library, the owners of the pay-to-use web portal *KM.ru* sued a number of 'free' Russian e-libraries for breach of copyright. They claimed to be acting on behalf of well-known literary greats such as the crime author Alexandra Marinina and the science fiction writer Eduard Gevorkyan. The plaintiffs demanded the fantastic figure of 500,000 US dollars in damages.

The company's acronym *KM* stands for Kirill and Methodius, the so-called Slavic apostles who laid the foundations for the creation of the Cyrillic alphabet, and thus today's written Russian language, in the 9th century. The defendant Moshkov ironically expressed his thanks on his website to the 'alphabet for being so kind as to lend out its letters'.

On 8 April 2004, the first hearing before the Moscow district court took place. The case cut to the very root of the convictions of the Russian internet community, which in general is highly antipathetic towards the enshrinement of copyright in a law that can be tested in the courts. The Russian blogosphere became the centre of the resistance to the trial. Before long, a supporter weblog appeared in which the Russian readers could express their ties to 'their' library. This is how Nataliya Belenkaya from Jerusalem put it:

> Eduard [Gevorkyan], please, let us have the library. It is perhaps naïve to ask you to take

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Roman. The Unhappy Love for Russian Hypertext (*Henrike Schmidt*)

The first and most famous Russian literary hypertext was *Roman* [Novel] (1995). It was initiated by the literary scholar Roman Leibov, who is based in Estonia. The three-fold meaning of the title, which identifies the genre, the topic (in Russian, *roman* also means a love affair) and the author, underlines that this text is a complicated conceptual work. The narrative starting point, however, is an intentionally banal love story. The hero of the novel throws a love letter to the object of his affections into the letterbox, but immediately regrets his impulsive act when she appears in the hallway of the block of flats with a rival. The classical intrigue derives from the questions of whether and how the "postal secret" can be kept and how the love triangle will resolve itself. *Roman* was formally organised as a collective writing project in which different authors would write the different plot lines concurrently. Leibov conceived it in order to prove that it was impossible to create a story in a collaborative, non-hierarchical way. Indeed, the result was a confusing multitude of potential plot lines. This flaw is not seen as a failure, but rather as a successful experiment. Nevertheless, this inauspicious success did not suggest that a further development of the hypertext genre would be productive. Thus, in Russia, the hypertext, which had been celebrated as a liberation from the despotism of linear text, died an early death.

http://www.cs.ut.ee/~roman_l/hyperfiction/htroman.html

analysis

back your statement to the court, but believe me, for us, the Russian-speaking readers abroad, it is vital that the library continues to exist in its present form. […] Please understand, it is not just a website or a collection of texts – it is a symbol, a kind of eternal flame, or, in other words: our *home*.

Despite the campaign of support, Maxim Moshkov lost the case brought by *KM.ru* in 2005. At 30,000 roubles (about 1,000 €), the fine was much lower than the damages claimed. Incidentally, the latter were not brought as compensation for a loss of income by the author, Gevorkyan, but rather for the 'moral damage' he had suffered.

Even before the judges pronounced their verdict, the library received an unexpected confirmation of its value from elsewhere, namely from the state. The *Federal Agency for the Press and Mass Media* approved funding worth 1,000,000 roubles (about 30,000 €). Its chairman, Mikhail Seslavinsky, remarked:

> Following the lively discussion on how copyright could be protected in electronic libraries, we have decided not to wait for a final decision and to support the central library of RuNet – Maxim Moshkov's site.

This was a pragmatic policy pursued beyond the legislative framework. Indeed, on 21 April 2004, the revised law 'On Copyright and Related Rights' passed its second reading in the Russian parliament. In accordance with international law and as a condition of the country's entry into the World Trade Organisation, copyright was extended from fifty to seventy years after an author's death.

Influenced by the trial, Moshkov himself drew a number of far-reaching conclusions regarding his library's policies. He invested the subsidy in the extension of the classical literature section in order to sidestep copyright problems. Moreover, the former people's librarian no longer accepts books sent by readers into his collection. Instead, Moshkov only cooperates with authors who submit their own texts because they wish to see an electronic version of their works.

Business Librarians and the Copyright Pirates

The years 2005–2006 indeed witnessed a decisive reorientation among Russian electronic libraries. While Moshkov unobtrusively reformed the procedure, a group of the once 'free' (meaning free-of-charge) e-libraries came together to develop a new business model. The online libraries *Aldebaran*, *Fictionbook*, *Litportal*, *Bookz.ru* and *Fanzin* created a new portal for the distribution of electronic books under the label *LitRes* (*http://www.litres.ru*): the texts can be read free of charge on the computer screen or downloaded at a cost. In both cases, the authors receive a fee, either from the price of the book or the site's advertising income. One of the most prominent authors to have signed a contract with *LitRes* on the distribution of his work over the internet is the science fiction writer Sergei Lukyanenko, whose books were also once available on Moshkov's site.

However, the resistance to the commercialisation of the internet has rallied together in the form of *Librusek* (*http://lib.rus.ec*). The library's server and operator Ilya Larin are in Ecuador, and thus far removed from the jurisdiction of the Russian courts. As with *lib.ru* before the trial, the roughly 75,000 readers 'produce' the books themselves. However, they no longer do this via the librarian, but rather put the works directly onto the platform, and thus adhere to the spirit of the Web 2.0 philosophy of user-generated content. As of January 2009, there were more than 100,000 works by over 32,000 authors. In comparison, the American *Project Gutenberg* lists 'only' 27,000 books that can be downloaded free of charge. Unlike Moshkov, the 'copyright pirates' are not interested in cooperating with the authors, as the site's

manifesto makes clear:

> The authors' views do not interest us. Nor does their personality. We take everyone. And deal with them in the same way. The only form of cooperation with the authors is the improvement in the quality of the books offered. Without restrictions.

The conflicts over copyright in the Russian internet and the literary libraries are acquiring an increasingly globalised character: while Russia conforms to the international laws, the global nature of the internet offers new technological opportunities to evade them.

Therefore, there are a number of practical explanations for the fact that the Russian internet is awash with literary texts. It perhaps has less to do with Sergei Kuznetsov's topos of literary rootedness and more with the gaps in the country's literary infrastructure – which, of course, does not detract from its appeal and importance. As Valeria Stelmakh underlined in the issue of *kultura* dealing with libraries and librarianship,[2] Russia's regions particularly suffer from a lack of well-stocked libraries and bookshops. Electronic resources often represent the only point of access, especially for contemporary literature. They are no less important for the Russian diaspora, which due to the repeated waves of emigration is scattered throughout the world. The internet, at least in theory, virtually reunites this Russia abroad with its country of origin. This communal aspect explains the particularly emotional connection to Russian e-libraries. They are not simply repositories of texts; they also serve as a virtual meeting place for readers by integrating them into the library. The cultural and national potential embodied in this form of identification via the e-libraries, which indeed also has political implications, is probably one of the motiva-

tions behind the support provided to a particular and highly symbolic amateur bibliophile project in RuNet, the Moshkov library, by the state, even though there is no

The Russan 'copyright pirates' from Ecuador: logo of the e-library Librusek. (http://lib.rus.ec/)

overall strategy for the development of the electronic libraries in Russia.

(With additional research by *Eugene Gorny*; Gorny has been actively involved in the construction of Russian cyberculture from the early 1990ties, has initiated numerous literary projects on the internet and wrote his doctoral thesis on the 'creative history of the Russian internet'.)

From the German by Christopher Gilley

READING SUGGESTIONS:

- International Union of Internet Professionals 'EZHE'. 'In Defense of Maxim Moshkov's Library' *http://ezhe.ru/actions/lib/eng.html*
- Gorny, Eugene, 'The Russian Internet: Between Kitchen-Table Talks and the Public Sphere', in *Art Margins. Contemporary Central & East European Visual Culture*, Thursday, 18 October 2007 *http://www.artmargins.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=145:the-russian-internet-between-kitchen-table-talks-and-the-public-sphere&catid=111:articles&Itemid=68*

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2 'Book Saturation and Book Starvation. The Difficult Road to a Modern Library System', *kultura*, 2008, No.4, pp.3–8.

DIGITAL (AFTER-)LIFE OF RUSSIAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

Vlad Strukov

sketch

In Russia, the Internet functions as a large depository of literary texts, particularly Russian classics, available for use free of charge (see, for example, *http://www.lib.ru/*). Their availability maintains different cultural myths, including one that suggests that the purpose of using creative writing is to serve the needs of the people rather than to make money. Just as Russian bookshops compete to sell a wide range of Russian classics, competing online libraries provide web users with a variety of texts. This phenomenon is part of the ongoing enlightenment project. If Tolstoy had worked at the end of the 20th century, he would have fully utilised the popular dimension of the Internet in order to disseminate his didactic ideas. Furthermore, online literary depositories signify the ideals and principles of commonality, sharing and belonging. In a country with a confused national identity, they function as important repositories of collective memories and imagination.

While maintaining old cultural myths – and, possibly, creating new ones – the Internet provides new opportunities for using and abusing the national literary heritage. A common concern is the corrosive impact of new technologies on a young readership. When preparing for their examinations, school and University students often use the Internet as a search tool for downloadable essays, examination papers and so forth. They also read classical literature in abridged versions available on the Internet.

There are, however, some liberating tendencies. Firstly, when reading on screen, users engage with literature in a new manner, which has the potential to create new meanings and practices. Secondly, the availability of texts, and the malleability of the environment in which they circulate, facilitate a destabilisation of the literary canon. To some extent, new technologies help to pass the power of aesthetic judgments over the literary canon from the authority of the state to the commonality of the reader. Thirdly, the Internet has enabled desacralisation of Russian classical literature, whereby the hierarchal structure of literary history has been replaced by the searchable environment of the web.

The crossover of Russian classical literature and Internet has produced some fascinating online creativity. In her 1996 work *Anna Karenin goes to Paradise (http://www.teleportacia.org/anna/)*, Olia Lialina, a world-famous author of net-based art, used Tolstoy's novel to examine the logic of the digital environment. For each of the three searches 'love', 'train' and 'paradise', she used a different search engine that would compile a list of related websites. The reader may browse through the generated links or continue to navigate through the art work, reaching the point when the work disintegrates. Lialina's piece provides an ironic commentary on the nature of reading and narrating and confirms the historical foundation of interpretation since many web links shown have fallen completely out of use. Therefore, Lialina's piece demonstrates the ephemeral nature of the Internet, in

*Dostoevsky 2.0 (*http://adiart.spb.ru/dost_yel.html*; accessed on 12 January 2009)*

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particular, and creativity, in general.

The theme of literature, memory and identity is also found in the work of Andrei Bakhurin, an animator who produces digital animation to be circulated and consumed on the Internet. In his

(Bakhurin: Papina biblioteka; http://www.scary.ru/eng/library.html*)*

2005 award winning *The Father's Library (http://www.scary.ru/eng/library.html)*, Bakhurin demonstrates how a personal identity is made up of different experiences, including reading classical literature. In the film, a young boy literally re-constructs his father by excavating and assembling parts of his body hidden inside books. The film suggests a notion of human identity as a repository of imaginary experiences, a notion that is similar to Lialina's interpretation of Tolstoy's text. Furthermore, though Bakhurin sees the Internet as a distribution tool and Lialina understands it as a creative tool, both the artists engage with the logic of algorithm and database on which the Internet is based. In both works, meaning is produced by conflating literary heritage and innovative technologies.

Eduard Chasovitin, a web artist and a filmmaker, uses a similar artistic strategy to create parodies of Russian classics. His *Dostoevsky FilmЪ (http://adi-art.spb.ru/)*, 2003–present, is a collection of images, games and films that feature Dostoevsky and his characters in new contemporary settings. Chasovi-

tin tests Dostoevsky's famous philosophical maxims by contrasting not only cultural environments of the 19th and 21st centuries but also two languages, Russian and English. The artist provides translations of the titles of Dostoevsky's novels that illuminate conflicts in a new, post-Soviet society. In this regard, Chasovitin simultaneously undermines and reinstalls Russian classical literature with its specific moral and philosophical agenda.

For these three artists, Russian classical literature provides materials necessary for the examination of the Internet. The result is a set of new art pieces that use rich visual languages to speak to Russian classical literature.

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(Bakhurin: Papina biblioteka; http://www.scary.ru/eng/library.html*)*

don (UK). He has published on Russian film, animation, mass media and national identity and is currently working on a volume on the uses of new media in Russia. He is also the founding editor and new media curator of *Static*, an international online journal (*http://static.londonconsortium.com/about.html*).

The Defence of Copyright in the Russian Internet

Pavel Protasov

Over the last three or four years, the number of court cases connected to the disregard of intellectual property in the Internet has risen in Russia. Nevertheless, in comparison to other infringements of copyright, such as the distribution of pirated CDs, they remain relatively few in number.

One of the basic methods for protecting copyright is the initiation of proceedings according to Article 146 of the Criminal Code, which addresses the responsibility for the infringement of copyright. Unlike the fines imposed upon offenders in civil processes, Article 146 makes provision for punishments of up to six years' imprisonment. This approach differs remarkably from that taken abroad, where there is a preference for civil proceedings. Thus, in the USA, for example, there are relatively few situations in which criminal law is applied: the infringement of copyright for profit, the distribution of copyrighted works before their official release and the distribution of copies of works worth more than 1,000 dollars within a period of 180 days. In all other cases, the rights holders must put together a civil law case and gather the evidence themselves, without the help of state institutions. In Russia, the number of civil suits is roughly equal to those prosecuted under criminal law, although the former often proceed from the latter.

The revisions to Section IV of the Civil Code, which came into force in 2008, perhaps provide one of the reasons for the increase in the number of civil suits in Russia. These changes considerably extend the powers of the police by allowing them to seize pirated copies without a court order. This amendment has received much criticism, but it makes it easier to collect evidence in civil cases and has thus increased their number.

Nevertheless, due to the statistical methods employed by the police to evaluate their own performance, the number of criminal cases is unlikely to fall. The number of investigations must remain the same or even surpass that of the previous year. In such a system, even if the rights owners turn to civil law methods of combating copyright infringement, the level of criminal cases will not drop.

Russian-cyberspace.org Interviews Pavel Protasov

Russian-cyberspace.org: *In the 1990s, a certain part of the Russian Internet 'community' believed that respect for copyright did not sit well with the collectivist Russian culture. This seemed to spur the development of electronic libraries. How do you see the situation facing electronic libraries in Russia following the case against Maksim Moshkov in 2005?*

Pavel Protasov: Within the Russian area of the Internet, a code of conduct has sprung up spontaneously regarding the use of materials protected by copyright. A number of these rules are not in line with copyright laws. For example, many Internet users believe that the use of others' work will not be punished as long as no financial gain is involved. This is not the case. At the same time, some of the rules of 'netiquette' are in fact stricter than the existing legislation; it is considered 'common courtesy' to name the 'author' of a particular idea or the person who discovered it even if that person did not originally come up with it.

As far as the electronic libraries are concerned, the overwhelming majority certainly infringe copyright. However, the rights holder is not able to sue all of them, with the result that the majority of these 'pirates' go on as before. Nevertheless, the periodic trials dealing with copyright have created a distorted image

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of the legislation among the public. For example, an extremely large number of Internet users simply do not know that the Civil Code allows for the limited use of works: the law permits one to download music, films and books for personal use regardless of who is distributing them or whether it is done legally. Despite this, the public perception clings to the idea that these downloads are illegal.

RC: *In response to the changes among electronic libraries in Russia (for example, M. Moshkov's new publication policy and the formation of the group of electronic libraries called 'Litres', which aims to charge for its services), a number of new projects, such as* Librusek (http://lib.rus.ec/), *have appeared beyond the territory of the Russian Federation and therefore outside its jurisdiction. What is your opinion on these activities?*

Advertisement of the 'Non-commercial Partnership of Software Producers': 'Almost like the original…'.
http://www.appp.ru/plakat/plakat.htm

PP: Of course, this type of activity is illegal. Moreover, it has a demonstrative character in that it graphically demonstrates that it is impossible to defeat piracy in the Net. It is a little like an 'act of public disobedience'. It is difficult to undertake legal proceedings against such resources. In general, the overwhelming majority of cases result from the distribution of illegal copies in the providers' local networks simply because it is easier to identify the users of such networks. It is more difficult to combat nationwide sites. In order to bring a suit, the rights holder has to help the law enforcement authorities find out where the offender is based or provide an expert opinion. Technically, the injured party should not pursue the second course as it violates a basic principle of legal procedure, i.e. that the expert must be independent. However, in cases of copyright infringement, this is common practice.

It is also possible for the administrators of 'pirate' sites to cooperate with the rights owners. The latter receive certain administrative rights and delete the content for which they are the copyright holders. It is simply not possible to bring all offenders to court.

RC: *Western commentators commonly claim that copyright is not observed in the Russian Federation or at best not observed as strictly as in the West. Your comments suggest the opposite is true.*

PP: Let me put it this way: the Russian law enforcement agencies are trying to put their house in order, but when you take into account the level of piracy that existed in the past, it is impossible to expect that it will drop immediately. Unfortunately, the necessity of fighting piracy has given rise to illegal tactics in that struggle. The main reason for this is the interpenetration of the organs of law enforcement and organisations created by the rights holders to defend their interests.

focus

One of the main Russian organisations for the 'struggle with piracy' is the 'Non-Commercial Partnership of Software Producers'. This organisation instructs the police and other experts in the methods of fighting the illegal distribution of works and the composition of expert statements on copyright infringements. The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation has repeatedly underlined that the question of 'counterfeit' goods is a legal matter; it must be decided by the organs of law enforcement and the courts, and not by third-party experts. However, this practice has already become commonplace and the court's rulings are simply ignored.

From the Russian by Christopher Gilley

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Pavel Protasov studied law and used to work for law enforcement agencies. At present he is a journalist. His interests include not only copyright law, but also the 'fight against piracy' and the illegal methods employed by the Russian police and public prosecutor's office in this fight.


THE SLANG OF VIRTUAL GOOD-FOR-NOTHINGS AND ITS LITERARY ADAPTATIONS (*HENRIKE SCHMIDT*)

The subculture of *padonki* [from *podonki* = good-for-nothings] started developing around the website *http://www.udaff.com* in the year 2000. Virtual good-for-nothings have their own distinctive language that is characterised by obscene vocabulary and grammatical and lexical deformations. This comically confusing linguistic culture can now be described as RuNet's most successful invention, and it has been exported into other genres. Its ingenious creations appear in everything from journalism to advertisements, but also in poetry and literature. For example, one of the characters in the literary chat novel *The Helmet of Horror* by the cult author Victor Pelevin speaks in the style of the *padonki*. The German literary scholar and folklorist Dagmar Burkhart discovered a further adaptation of internet slang in a work by Vladimir Sorokin, who retold the most famous murder scene in Russian literature, Rodion Raskolnikov's killing of Aliona Ivanovna with an axe in *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoyevsky, in the idiom of the *padonki* (*Den oprichnika* [Day of the Oprichnik], 2008). Digital folklore has become a narrative nutrient for literature.

READING SUGGESTION:

Goriunova, Olga (2006). '"Male literature" of Udaff.com and other networked artistic practices of the cultural resistance', in Henrike Schmidt, Katy Teubener and Natalja Konradova (eds.), *Control + Shift. Public and private usages of the Russian Internet*, Norderstedt: Books on demand, pp. 177–197 *http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/russ-cyb/library/texts/en/control_shift/Goriunova.pdf*

TUBE POEM. AN ANIMATED WALK THROUGH THE ST. PETERSBURG UNDERGROUND *(HENRIKE SCHMIDT)*

One of the few multi-media hypertexts in Russian which brings together the method of text animation and digressive narration is the digital poem *In the Tube (and outside). Observations* (2001) by Georgi Sherdev (animation), Sergei Vlasov (text) and Alexei Dobkin (music). The poem's opening sequence,

during which the text animation scrolls past the viewer's eyes, conceptualises the tube as 'original magma' and 'womb', drawing on the mythic potential that it has in the context of Russian cultural history. After this, accompanied by the typical background noises of the Russian tube, a plan appears that shows the different stations on the underground. The
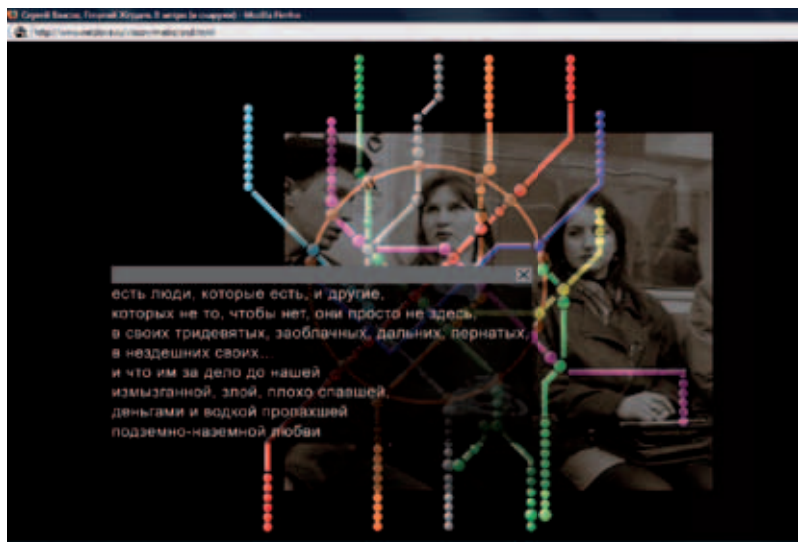
Screenshot fragment from the Tube Poem. (http://www.netslova.ru/vlasov/metro/snd.html)

reader can click on the individual stops, which brings up a window containing the 'observations' mentioned in the work's title. Each observation is in a different style – from notes, jokes and aphorisms to extracts from newspapers and books, the passenger's classical reading material. In this way, the analogy between reading and a train journey is obvious and successful: in both, one can 'begin one's journey' wherever one wishes, 'getting on' and 'getting off' the text.

> there are people who simply *are*, and others –
> not that they weren't there, they simply aren't here,
> but rather in their behind the seven hills, beyond the clouds, in the distance, the winged
> not here…
> and, anyway, what do they have to do with our
> used, evil, drowsy,
> smelling of money and vodka
> underground-earthly love
>
> http://www.netslova.ru/vlasov/metro/index.html

LITERARY WEBLOGS? WHAT HAPPENS IN RUSSIAN WRITERS' BLOGS

Ellen Rutten

analysis

In their blogs, Russian literary authors mingle artistic and more pragmatic elements into one conceptual whole, without intervention from editors or designers. The result is a composition in which literary elements blend with other forms of communicative and creative expression. One can perhaps best summarize the genre, with its heterogeneous functions of literary, social-network and marketing tool, as a kreatiff - *a post-Soviet neologism that conjoins notions of literary creation, commodification, and digitality.*

In twenty-first century Russia, a major platform for literary production is the blog, a frequently modified webpage with entries archived in reverse chronological order. Among Russian Internet users, this online self-publication instrument attracted increasing attention ever since Roman Leibov entered the first Russian entry on February 1, 2001. Eight years later, the Russian-speaking blogosphere has bourgeoned to a solid 6,3 million blogs, the most popular of which attract tens of thousands of readers on a daily basis.[1]

If their authors range from enthusiastic school girls to right-wing activists, then a substantial group of Russian bloggers focuses specifically on literary writing. A literary orientation marks the Russian-speaking Internet in general, which has manifested a dazzling online literary activity from the start. At the core of this flourishing online literary landscape is the literary weblog, a belles-lettres genre which makes hearts beat faster especially in Russia. With (literary) blog research being in its infancy it is hard to give exact percentages, but that a substantial number of Russian blogs serves as a tool for literary creation is beyond doubt.

Or is it? When exactly can a blog be labeled 'literary'? If one believes the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the term 'literature' has since the mid-twentieth century been reserved for 'creative, imaginative, fictional, or non-practical' writing. That definition is turned topsy-turvy by the weblog and its wedlocks of formal with informal, textual with graphic-cum-audiovisual, and esthetic with practical or commercial elements.

Obviously, this blurring of borders between literary and non-literary creation is not unprecedented. Writers never confined themselves rigidly to literary spheres; literary scholars haven't hesitated to venture beyond them; and neither is the blog the spanking new discursive genre for which web utopians take it. Media theorists have convincingly shown just how variegated a list of long-familiar discursive genres weblogs remediate – from diaries and poetry albums to street talk, and from ship logs to kitchen calendars, or, to coin two Russian examples, from *samizdat* to *stengazety*.

What *is* new is the fact that in their blogs, literary authors mingle artistic and more pragmatic elements into one conceptual whole, without intervention from editors or designers. The result is a composition in which literary elements blend with other forms of communicative and creative expression. This process of hybridization, so some argue, is particularly intense in the Russian-speaking blogosphere.

This article zooms in on that Russian blogosphere – more particularly, on a selection of a) professional writers who live off literary and/or creative writing, and b) authors for whom that is not the case, but who do enjoy a high symbolic status in professional literary-intellectual circles and whose writing is singled out in quality journals such as *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* [New Literary Review] or *Novyi mir* [New World].

'WHERE TO FIND AQUAVIT?' THE BLOG AS LITERARY SAFETY ZONE

Visitors to the blog of writer-cum-essayist Tat'iana

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1 Figures based on Yandex' daily updated blog report of 26 January, 2009 *(blogs.yandex.ru/).*

Tolstaia (*tanyant.livejournal.com*) are likely to stumble across a large number of literarily oriented posts.[2] One can hardly call her weblog a literary endeavor in the classical sense of the word, however: besides literary sketches and mini-essays, the author treats visitors to happy Easter wishes; recipees for cakes and salads; links to her own talkshow, or to films or pictures which the author deems funny; invitations to read or attend her interviews; or practical requests ('where do I find Aquavit in Moscow?').

This mongrel form – does one come here to enjoy literary writing? to watch pictures? to decide where to go tonight? – is not unique for Tolstaia's blog. On that of the poet Dmitrii Vodennikov (*vodennikov. livejournal.com*), poems and prose fragments alternate with pictures and cartoons, how-to-get-there information on performances, questions to readers ('which films do you recommend watching?', 'what will you devour sorry eat on New Year's eve?'), and links to interviews with the author, films of public readings, or to his writings in other media. The blog in no way indicates formally when a post contains practical information and when a carefully crafted poem.

A closer look at (the publicly available entries of)[3] other writers' blogs learns that Vodennikov's heterogeneous posts are no exception either. In the weblog of Svetlana Martynchik, alias Maks Frai, literary texts and PR announcements are outweighed by numerous photograph-only posts *(chingizid. livejournal.com)*. In that of Evgenii Grishkovets *(e-grishkovets.livejournal.com)* texts are also interlarded with photographs and audiovisual fragments, although here the diaristic-epistolary function prevails, with most posts starting and ending with 'Hello!' and 'Your Grishkovets'. Dmitrii Bavil'skii's

blog *(paslen.livejournal.com)* not only combines most of the functions mentioned, but in order to enter it, readers must scroll along eight entries with sizable pictures of his novel covers.

To these selected examples of professional writers' blogs, many could be added. Much could be said, too, about their design: rather than working with professional book designers, the authors devise their own pages, pick their own background colours and font types, and opt for a personal user picture that can vary from a classical portrait photograph (Grishkovets) to an intricate geometrical figure (Vodennikov).

In theoretical terms, how should one define the jumbles of literary and non-literary components that many blogs present? On the pages of this journal, in 2006 Gasan Gusejnov branded the blog post a 'new literary genre'.[4] Four years earlier, the Russian literary historians Irina Kaspe and Varvara Smurova went a step further by rejecting the idea of a 'literary' blog altogether.[5] To them, what makes Russian blogs unique is their 'near-literariness' (*okololiteraturnost'*): the tendency to serve as a 'safety zone' where literature is not 'the centre of attention', where one can write 'according to the laws of the amateur literary community'. If Kaspe and Smurova do not provide any statistics, then Russian writers' blogs do tend to comply with their findings. Tolstaia, for one, openly starts her blog by marking it as a distinct discursive space, where she is entitled to '– writing with mistakes; – disobeying all grammar rules if I feel like it; – swearing'.

This preoccupation with amateur or 'non-literary literary creation' is far from unparallelled in literary history, and at the moment it ranks high on the agenda of Russia's literary community. In the poetry

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2 English translations of Tolstaia's fiction include *White Walls. The Collected Stories* (transl. Gambrell and Bouis), New York 2007; and *The Slynx* (transl. Gambrell), New York 2007.

3 Bloggers can opt for 'friends-only' posts, which can solely be seen by bloggers whom the author has formally accepted as readers ('friends').

4 See Gusejnov's article *Five Poets in the Russian Blogsophere* in *kultura* October 10/2006, available online at *www. kultura-rus.de/kultura_dokumente/ausgaben/englisch/ kultura_10_2006_EN.pdf*.

5 Kaspe and Smurova focus on *Livejournal.com*, where the majority of Russian blogs is launched.

journal *Jacket*, Moscow-born poet and translator Peter Golub recently wrote that especially younger post-Soviet poets 'have an inclusive approach to poetry', which makes older colleagues wonder 'whether the writing counts as poetry at all'.

But if one must believe Kaspe and Smurova, 'near-literariness' has become a principal writing mode especially in blogs – or rather, in *Russian* blogs: only there, so they argue, are literary fragments so eagerly and persistently embedded in a mishmash of 'emphatic reactions, mundane advice, literary instructions, offers to help out, to bring some tangerines, to adjust the second paragraph, or to rearrange a few words'.

ADD TO CART. THE BLOG AS PR TOOL

As formulated in this last quotation, Kaspe and Smurova's ideas open up questions about another distinctive feature of blogs, one which turns them into even more hybrid creations: interactivity.

A blog is rarely a product of one author: other blog-gers can react to posts in comments which are appended to the original entries. Although, as surveys show, most blogs generate little to no comments, in Russia the relevance of comment threads to writers' blogs is hard to overrate. Authors who were established public figures when starting their blog, such as Grishkovets or Tolstaia, receive hundreds of comments per entry. They often participate in the commentary process by entering into a dialogue with readers. Bewildering many a critic today, this shift in reader-writer relation makes it hard to establish where the original author's voice ends and the reader's voice comes in – particularly when, as has happened more than once, authors replace first versions of literary posts with new versions adapted by their commentator-readers.

The comment function is relevant, too, in terms of literary commodification. Rather than introspective diaries, blogs are a product designed to be consumed. Not coincidentally is *tysiachnik* – the word for bloggers which generate over a thousand read-
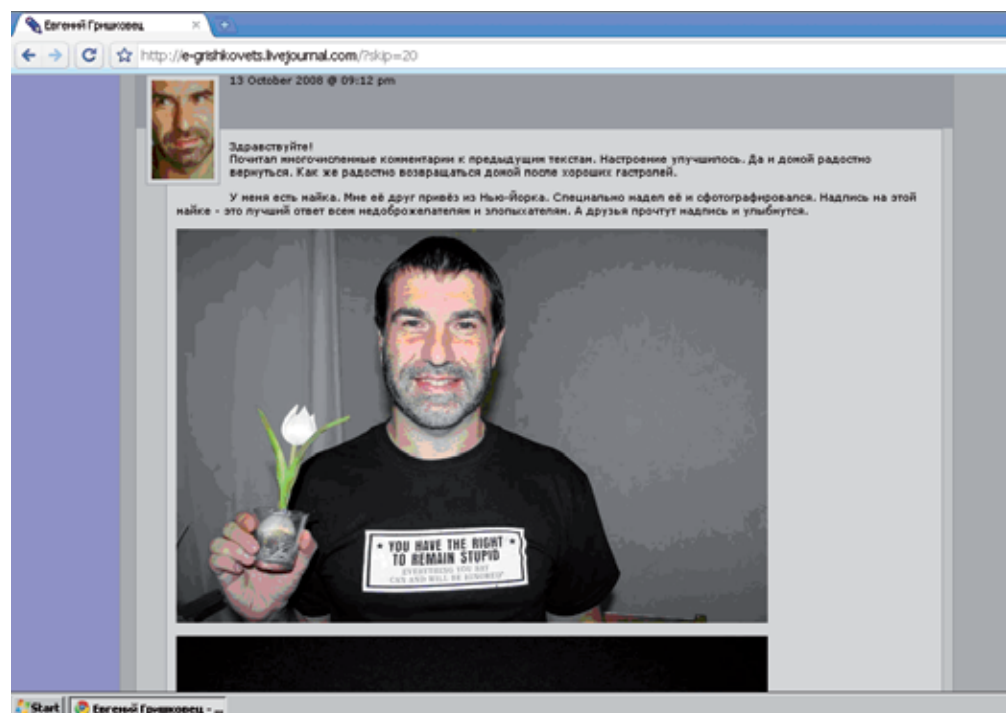
Blog Grishkovets: 'And the friends will smile.' – Return to the 'virtual home'. (http://e-grishkovets.livejournal.com/?skip=20, *screenshot fragment*)

17

ers – a popular neologism in twenty-first century Russia. The writers mentioned are all *tysiachniki*, with audiences varying from 2853 (Vodennikov) to 26330 (Grishkovets) readers.[6]

It is to these readers-cum-commentators that the literary *and* PR-related posts in blogs are addressed. If shunning commercial ads on their weblogs, most authors do employ their blog to promote their own work. And they do so avidly: Russian blog writers not only invite readers to public readings, but they also display pictures of new publications, link readers to their personal websites, or re-direct them to sites where their work can be purchased online. Some blogs turn into sellable products themselves: recently Grishkovets, following other cult bloggers such as Alexander Markin and Maksim Kononenko, reworked a series of blog posts into a book (*God zhzhizni*, 2008).

That the 'blook' or blog-to-book shift is not necessarily a successful one, implies the case of polumrak (real name unknown, *polumrak.livejournal.com*). Posting prose bits which were read by an unwavering few thousand readers in the mid-2000s, this blogger was invited by a publisher to rework his entries into a novel – but polumrak's online popularity dwarfs the 300-copy, meagerly-selling print version of *Nathaniel's Book (Kniga Natanielia*, 2006).

Turning a blog into a book product is merely one economically strategic move within a media genre where self-PR is all but the rule. According to a recent survey by search engine Technorati, bloggers are highly active in generating traffic to their blogs, which perceptibly enhance both their symbolic and material status.[7] That this is true for Russia no less than other countries, indicates the fact that several post-Soviet writers started their career with 'a school of guestbooks and forums, and then

Livejournal', to quote Sergei Kostyrko. Apart from some of the authors mentioned, a prime example of such a 'blog-born' author is Linor Goralik: the claim to fame of this prominent writer and journalist lies primarily in the popularity of her blog (*snorapp.livejournal.com*).

LITERARY BLOGS AS *KREATIFF*

Outlet for literary creation, sales-strategy playground, career booster: writers' blogs are an undeniable treasure chest for literary pleasures, but they at the same fulfill other functions and rely on non-textual – visual, audiovisual – media. Given that variety in functions and media types, can one still speak of them as literary compositions? 'Near-literariness' is a productive notion, but it doesn't cover the weblog's socio-economic potential. The bloggers mentioned not only produce 'near-literary' content, but they also enact (with the exception, probably, of Tolstaia) an increasingly popular behavioral model among post-Soviet literary professionals – one according to which a writer doesn't need to hide that creative writing can be a means of financial subsistence. Rather than posing as Solzhenitsynesk 'voices of the nation', these writers openly aim at social recognition and financial independence with – literary or other forms of – creative writing in the market economy that Russia is today.[8]

They do so nowhere as openly as in their blogs. Perhaps the content of these blogs is therefore best represented with the notion of *kreatiff. Kreativ*: in perestroika Russia, that British loan word was introduced to distinguish commercial creative products from highbrow artistic creation. In the deliberate misspellings that mark Russian online slang, *kreativ* became *kreatiff*, its meaning shifted – and today, *kreatiff* is a popular designation both for those online texts which are considered to possess literary qual-

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6 The numbers are taken from the authors' blogs on January 14, 2009.

7 For Technorati's *State of the Blogosphere 2008*, see *www.technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere*.

8 On socio-economic and professional coping strategies among post-Soviet writers, see, among others, Andrew Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant After Communism*, Chicago 2006.

ities, and for any text that is published online. Encapsulating notions of literary creation, digitality, and commodification, *kreatiff* is a helpful theoretical concept in understanding the blogs of each of the authors mentioned here, together with many others. As a *kreatiff*: thus one could summarize the post-Soviet writer's blog, with its heterogeneous functions of vehicle for literary production, social-network instrument, and marketing tool. Conceptualizing this intellectual-practical crossbreed in terms of a *kreatiff* is theoretically fruitful, perhaps, more than defining it as 'literary writing', a phrase that covers part of, but certainly not all that happens in Russian writers' *blogi*.

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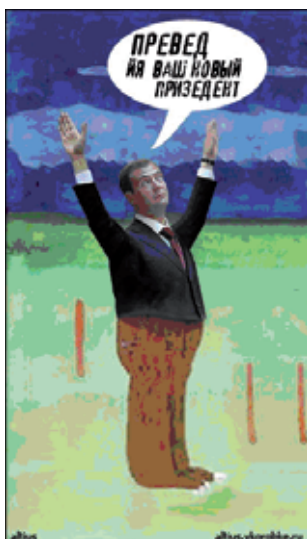
READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Ellen Rutten: 'More Than a (Blog) Poet? Why Russian Writers Didn't Blog on the 2008 Elections'. The Russian Cyberspace Journal, issue 1; see *http://www.russian-cyberspace.com/issue1/ellen-rutten.html*.
- *russ-cyberspace.livejournal.com*. Academic blog on (literary) developments in the Russian-speaking Internet, updated several times a month.

MEDVED THE BEAR. DIGITAL FOLKLORE AND POLITICAL MEDVEDIANA (HENRIKE SCHIMDT)

Medved the Bear is perhaps the most popular creation of the digital folklore flourishing in the Russian internet. The figure is based on a picture by the American painter and musician John Lurie: an anthropomorphic bear surprises a couple having sex in the forest. 'Surprise' says the friendly forest-dweller; this is rendered in the Russian version as 'preved' (a phonetic deformation of 'privet' = 'hello'). This gave birth to the cult greeting on the Russian internet and the starting signal for an autochthonous contemporary legend that is still developing.

The original Medved (http://onona.su/197-gavarit-medved-ili-uchim-albanskijj.html)

The bear *Medved* became the subject not only of jokes and fairy tales but also videos and computer games. In contrast to the guided form of literary hypertext, this form of spontaneous, collective, cross-media storytelling has been a success. Beneficial to the figure's popularity has been the similarity to the surname of President Dmitri Medvedev, who himself is known as an internet freak. As a consequence, a whole range of *Medvediana* has come into being, which has even occasionally been channelled by the Kremlin's media strategists for political PR.

Medved: 'Preved. I am your new president.' (http://vkorobke.ru/preved20.jpg)

'DISTINGUISHED POET OF THE INTERNET'

Interview with Alexander Kabanov

interview

Virtual medal
'Distinguished Poet of the Internet'

And so Odysseus visited our sanctum anew,

drank to the fatherland.ua and cried for the motherland.ru

We, too, Polyakov, should take the beckoning prize:

win the gods' curse and undertake the voyage!

Memorise the Morse code, laugh in the face of fate

and thrust our oars into the sea's silvery flank.

The Crimean sun dragged itself up, with circles under its eyes:

as if it were hung-over, or had got out of the wrong side of bed…

Squinting, like our true enemies (aka the Japanese).

I dreamed that someone woke me, took me to a field without corn,

there is no longer a homeland, you will never return!

The sea surrounds. The pages have been torn from the diary.

Birds flock together in the middle of the night. White. Without language…

There is a smell of rotten cherries. Iodine and salt fill

the air. Everything is calm, the radio waves rustle…

News: peace in Europe…. Three days later, at last,

Simonov comes to Penelope. Remember: 'Wait for me'?

You know, Andrei, @pe, the sail under wind.com.

We don't need Ithaca. For whom does the ship's bell ring?

Drunk fishermen pull in empty nets.

We swim in the Internet. One cannot offer oneself a hand…

Alexander Kabanov 2005

Russian-cyberspace.org: Alexander Kabanov, you are a 'Distinguished Poet of the Internet'. You received this unusual prize in 2003 as part of the competition 'The Poet and the Internet' run by the literary jour-

nal 'Web Literature' (Setevaya slovesnost). Indeed, not only have you published on a number of literary sites, but your writing also employs the metaphors and mythology of the Web. You write 'a monk turns off his laptop before sleep'; death appears in the form of 'Internet marketing', while God 'turns off the comments'. How would you describe the influence which the Internet exerts on your writing and your poetical language in a more general sense?

Alexander Kabanov: The prize really is unusual, if only because it has only been awarded once and was created for poets actively publishing on the Internet. The mythologems of the Internet interest me as an additional linguistic tool; they may not enrich the general lexis, but they do at least introduce some novelty and diversity. This is a new living space with its own code of behaviour, language, aesthetics and manias…. It is natural that this new existential space has a considerable influence not only on those writing poetry and prose, but also on any active user. People use the Internet to buy goods, make new acquaintances, get married, relax, create and destroy their author's page…. Almost like in real life. At the same time, when putting this world into words, we encounter paradoxes: let's only think about the meaning of the wonderful phrase 'virtual death'! :)

RC: *'Drunk fishermen pull in empty nets. We swim in the Internet. One cannot offer oneself a hand…'. In your poems the element of water plays a significant role. Above all the (Black) Sea with its fish, fishermen, boats and sails, is organically linked to ancient mythology, whose heroes – from Odysseus to Zeus – populate the landscape of your poetical work. And has the Net,* sui generis *a virtual element, already become part of your personal poetical mythology?*

AK: Yes, the Web is one of the components, and an important one, but not the main one. It is a method of communication, a convenient means for distributing and preserving texts and one more way of understanding humankind and reality.

RC: *One of your poems contains the line 'And cursing its hung-over handwriting, my diary keeps me'. This is a reference to the old-fashioned diary from the days prior to LiveJournal, a site which created a lot of buzz even before it was a year old. These days you keep a diary on LiveJournal. What significance does it have for you? Does it 'keep you'? Does it influence your perception of your own creativity, of your own literary writing?*

AK: The diary is a symbol in this poem. Maybe our existence is the divine diary or sketch book, and people are letters, and people in love are whole phrases. My blog on LiveJournal is more meditative. In this case, I am more interested in reading others and commentating on what I have read. And this diary gives me more empathy to others than understanding 'who am I?', 'what's happening to me?'.

RC: *In your writing, the theme of the local is very important: many of your poems are dedicated to, for example, the Crimea or Kyiv. And does your 'domain poetry', in the form of constructions such as fatherland.ua and motherland.ru, suggest the presence of certain regional origins in the World Wide Web? Is the Internet, contrary to its global 'nature', really a place for the expression of regional identities and local myths?*

interview

AK: I was born in Kherson, a stone's throw from the Crimea. I have worked and lived in Kyiv for more than 20 years. This creates a kind of pole: homeland-capital. If Kherson is the developer for my poems, then Kyiv is the fixing agent. The Internet, despite its global scope, is nonetheless a peculiar sect in terms of its interests. The Internet is a universe, made up of millions of get-togethers, clans, groups, communities and so on. In them, with time, they are creating a language for themselves, rules for acceptance into this or that club, whether it is interested in literature, photography, politics…. Web life begets its own Web myths, gurus and illicit workers.

RC: *Russian literature on the Internet is a global phenomenon. And its authors and readers are spread all over the world. Is there a difference between Russian and Russian-language literature, and between the Russian and the Russian-language Internet?*

AK: There is no Russian-language literature. There is Russian literature. And it is not important what nationality you have: if you write poems in the Russian language it means that you are a Russian poet. Everything else is just geography.

From the Russian by Christopher Gilley

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Alexander Kabanov is a journalist, publisher and poet living in Kyiv. He is the author of four books of poetry and the editor-in-chief of the journal of cultural resistance 'ShO' (*www.sho.kiev.ua*) in Russian and Ukrainian. He also organises poetry festivals and slams.

PREVIEW:

kultura 2-2009 will appear in mid-April 2009. It will deal with the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian cultural life. Nikolay Mitrokhin (Bremen) will be guest editor.