

evidence suggests the parallel is rather extensive. The tendentious repetition of certain ideas seems to be evidence of this relationship. The expression is competent but hardly engaging; it is not infrequently unidiomatic, often in a way that is obtrusive and disruptive to the reader's train of thought; the number of typographical and other editorial errors is unacceptably high. This is a great shame, because it renders the reader's task much more arduous and frustrating than it should otherwise be, given the intrinsic interest and, indeed, drama of the subject matter. Despite this, the book remains a valuable corrective to simplistic glosses on the troubled decade in Soviet music that was the 1930s.

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Emily Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953–1975: the Thaw Generation*, Russian Transformations: Literature, Thought, Culture, vol. 2 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), vii + 362 pp. ISBN 978-3-03911-370-5. SFR 69.00

The renaissance that occurred in Russian poetry in the thaw years after the death of Stalin has sometimes been referred to as a 'bronze' age following the Pushkinian 'golden' age and the 'silver' age of the period 1890–1920. Although by the mid-twentieth century the centre of artistic as well as political authority had moved from St Petersburg to Moscow, the former capital still maintained a powerful and distinctive poetic voice and was able to produce arguably the most distinguished of Russian Soviet period poets, the Nobel Prize winner Iosif Brodskii. While Brodskii himself has received significant critical attention, very little work has been done either to examine the verse of other Leningrad poets, or to place their work in its proper literary-historical context. Emily Lygo has produced the first book-length study of this period and has addressed both of these questions. In doing so she has brought the experience of the thaw generation poets into the broader history of twentieth-century Russian literature, shown the opportunities and obstacles presented by the specific set of literary-political conditions which prevailed, and also given clear, compelling and incisive accounts of the work of several individual poets. This is a considerable achievement, which will allow for a much more finely nuanced reading of Soviet-period poetry into the future.

The book falls into two parts. The first two chapters, based substantially on archival sources, look in detail at the role of communist party policy and of official and unofficial organisations in directing and facilitating literary output. A number of themes emerge: not least the extraordinary richness and complexity of the literary process on both a formal and an informal level. Although Lygo detects a movement away from the narrow focus of high Stalinist poetry before 1953, the main impetuses for change came from a conference on lyric poetry held in Leningrad in 1953 and the Second Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow the following year. Lyric poetry was to 'catch up' with other genres and young poets were to be encouraged to write and publish. In response the Leningrad Union of Writers initially ran and supported numerous 'Literary Organisations' (LitOs) throughout the city and facilitated the entry of younger poets into the Union. Lygo stresses that in the early stages of the thaw no real distinction was made between official and unofficial publication – only after the fall of Khrushchev in 1964 and the subsequent reduction in support for young writers did unofficial literary activity become more self-conscious. As official sponsorship of the LitOs was withdrawn and opportunities for beginning poets to get their work into print through official channels, or even to read in public, were reduced, so increasingly *samizdat* and later *tamizdat* channels came to be seen as a vehicle for dissent.

In the second part of her book, Lygo turns to specific poets of the Leningrad thaw generation. This is necessarily a selective rather than a comprehensive review, but the writers chosen all demonstrate the immense fertility of the period. Although there was no Leningrad school as such, there was a shared sense of both the importance of the literary tradition and the transformative power of poetic language. Aleksandr Kushner, who worked largely within the literary establishment, is read alongside other officially published poets. Like them his poetry is formally conservative, but Kushner avoids the grand themes of socialist realism to focus instead on highly personalized intellectual and emotional topics, linking the past to the present through the use of conversational language and an extensive network of literary allusion. Viktor Sosnora, Dmitrii Bobyshev and Iosif Brodskii are considered separately as case studies of alternative poetic careers. Whereas Sosnora was able to publish in the Soviet Union throughout the 1960s and only later turned to *tamizdat*, Bobyshev and Brodskii, notwithstanding their close association with Anna Akhmatova, were much more on the fringes of official literary life. Brodskii especially had very few formal contacts in literary circles and was

arrested for ‘parasitism’ in 1963. Both, under different circumstances, emigrated to the United States – Brodskii in 1972, Bobyshev in 1979 – and their poetic response to the attendant dislocation is a theme addressed by Lygo in some detail. With all three poets Lygo’s main approach is to explore their different responses to the literary tradition and strategies for the renovation of poetic language. For Sosnora and Bobyshev, where very little previous criticism exists, Lygo’s essays are particularly welcome.

If this book has a weakness, it is that the two sections – the literary-historical and the literary-critical – are not sufficiently integrated. While Kushner is treated alongside ‘official poetry’, the three other poets are considered largely in isolation. Do the points they have in common constitute a specifically Leningrad voice? In what way was this informed by the literary-administrative structures in place during the thaw years? How did the poets influence each other or other members of their immediate circles? These and similar questions of course could not even begin to be answered without the groundwork that Lygo has provided, and the present publication is a landmark which will undoubtedly inspire further clarifications and discoveries.

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