

# The Names of Poets in Georgij Ivanov's Poetry

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GEORGIJ IVANOV THE EMIGRANT POET was born in 1894 in Russia and died in France in 1958. He is one of the most modern Russian poets, and the use of the names of poets represents one of the modern aspects in his poetry. Whether his reference to past masters is homage or parody, their names appear predominantly as objects of his new technique. As a result, the traditional terms "homage" and "parody" themselves become ambiguous.

Unlike the traditional Russian poets or even some contemporary poets, Ivanov does not address or invoke his great predecessors, as for example, Puškin frequently does (To Žukovskij: Bless me, oh poet! To Baratynskij: Every line of your story, etc.). In the more recent period the Symbolist poet Alexandr Blok uses names much less frequently, and his references are limited almost exclusively to the names of the Symbolist period (Anna Axmatova, Valerij Brjušov, Vjačeslav Ivanov). The contemporary poet Evtušenko recently published one of his poems in the form of an epistle under the title "Letter to Esenin" (*Pis'mo Eсениnu*). In Ivanov's last book 1943–1958. *Stixi* ("1943–1958. Poems") with which this study is concerned, the poems carry no titles at all.<sup>1</sup>

Names of poets appear in Ivanov's poetry in four different contexts: first, to identify epigraphs; second, as non-textual dedications; third, as epithets; and fourth, predominantly as rich verbal material necessary to the structure of the poem. These latter names are frequently accompanied by some additional elements of the poetic world of a given poet. Examples of these are hidden citations, paraphrases, or poetic themes. This group is the largest, the most interesting, and deserves closer study.

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<sup>1</sup> All references to the poetry of Georgij Ivanov are taken from 1943–1958. *Stixi*, Izdanie "Novogo Žurnala," New York, 1958; all page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.

Here the names of poets pertain to Ivanov's technique and his entire poetic world. However, this group is not homogeneous and shows some traces of the traditional division into poems of homage and poems of parody. Ivanov does not give any direct clues as to this division, since the elements of both can be found in most poems. The poems consist predominantly of trochaic and iambic meters.

In the poems of trochaic meter the names of Axmatova, Lermontov, and Turgenev, and once of Ivanov himself, are found. We know that the poetry of Axmatova and Lermontov exercised a considerable influence on Ivanov. Particularly the poem which includes the name of Axmatova (p. 46) seems to pay a tribute to the artistic world of the poetess, evoking St. Petersburg, imitating her concreteness, narrative form and consciseness. Placed in the concluding lines of the poem, the name of the poetess identifies this world and sums up the poem: "Axmatova foretold me: 'You shall remember this evening.'"

The name of Turgenev (p. 96) appears in a poem written in trochaic hexameter with the fitting verb *grustil* (Turgenev was sad), which with Ivanov acquires an ironic tone. The reminiscent mood is stressed by this word repeated as a refrain together with the name of Turgenev. However, the last oxymoronic line: "The golden fall of serfdom" (*Zolotaja osen' krepostnogo prava*) unobtrusively injects poison into the entire context and shows elements of parody. Otherwise the poem would have rather closely resembled Turgenev's melancholy and stylistic beauty.

A new tone is created in the poem which incorporates Lermontov's name (p. 88). The name of Lermontov is a direct reference to a thematic variation on Lermontov's poem, "I walk alone" (*Vyxožu odin ja na dorogu*). The name of Lermontov serves only to support Ivanov's own confessional mood. The tone, too, is hardly reminiscent of Lermontov's poem. Ivanov's poem is a lowered paraphrase of one part of Lermontov's poem — the theme of death and song — which is immediately identified by Lermontov's name.

In his ambiguous way Ivanov can speak even of himself renouncing his situation of the poet, Georgij Ivanov, who is "marked by fate," and longing to become an average "anybody," with any name whatsoever: "If only I could renew my life / Not as Georgij Ivanov" (p. 70). The modern poet is lowered to the condition of every-

day contemporary man. Curiously, this new situation enables the poet to speak more freely of himself. Ivanov's own name appears three times in his book *1943-1958. Stixi.*, more frequently than that of any other poet. Of the three poems in which he mentions his own name, one – recounting the poetry symbolized in the name Georgij Ivanov – belongs to the trochaic group; the other two are found among the iambic poems.

The names of two poets, Annenskij and Gumilëv, are mentioned in one poem built on contrast. There are many reflections of Annenskij in Ivanov's poetry, and, by contrast, Ivanov has little in common with Gumilëv. The brief statement of Ivanov's attitude toward these two poets is emphasized by the juxtaposition of these two names in the concluding lines of the two-stanza poem: "That which Annenskij tenderly loved / That which Gumilëv could not endure" (p. 87). However, this poem of three foot amphibrach remains isolated among the trochaic and iambic poems of Ivanov.

Of the four trochaic poems briefly considered here, two with the names of Axmatova and Turgenev are thematically reminiscences, in which images of the past, such as of St. Petersburg and Russia, predominate. References to these poets are surrounded by a certain elegiac tone, derived in part from the reminiscent mood and in part from the poet's use of the trochaic meter. Two remaining poems – one with Lermontov's name and one with Ivanov's own name – pertain more to the contemplative mood of the poet at the time of writing and in their new and ambiguous statement are closer related to the iambic group of poems.

Let us now consider the iambic poems, which comprise the greatest number of Ivanov's poems employing names of poets. Among the names here we find Homer, Lermontov, Gogol', Tjutčëv, Leont'ev, Villon, Omar Khayyam, and twice that of Ivanov himself. In these iambic poems there is more ambiguity of Ivanov's later period, more evidence of his new technique of frank poetic transformation of the poetic material. The degree of application of this technique is, however, different in each poem.

The poem containing the name Homer (p. 86) presents the greatest difficulty in our classification. This poem is probably closest to the traditional homage to past poets, and to poetry in general in the book. In this poem Ivanov expresses his strongest affirmation of art to be found in his book; such eloquent words as "inextinguishable

light" (*neugasimyj svet*) constitute a rare affirmation in the poet's new poetic world. A classical "mob" (*čern'*) evocative of Puškin's "The Poet and the Mob" (*Poët i tolpa*) and of other poets makes its strange appearance in Ivanov's poetry. Puškin's epigraph *Procul este profani* could, it seems, stand also for Ivanov's poem. As a symbol of poetry, Homer is brought forward even to Ivanov's own time and given modern significance. The modern tone is introduced only very subtly. We find that the poet Homer is humbled, made equal to the contemporary poet by the familiar epithet "blind" (*slepoj*) which within this poem is, however, a syntactic and semantic parallel to the "Unknown, destitute contemporary poet" (*bezzvestnyj, obezdoennyj . . . nynješnij poët*). In his new way, too, the modern poet discovers the essence of all art – that of "measure": . . . *Est' mera . . . Gomera!* (see also Mandelštam: *Est' ivolgi . . .*) in the very texture of Homer's name.

Much more characteristic of Ivanov's iambic poems is a poem containing the name of Gogol' (p. 44). In this short poem of three stanzas the poet presents us with different moods and quickly moving images. First there is a stranger, and Ivanov's ridicule of his nose and his speech, frankly expressed by the word "ridiculous" (*smešnoj*). In the next stanza, a note of compassion and tragedy is sounded. Then it becomes a naturalistic little tragi-comedy: "to eat, to sleep, to blow your nose," which, it seems, concerns all of us and is resolved – without resolving anything – into the image and the name of Gogol'. The name Gogol' has rich connotations, and Ivanov uses them in several ways with allusions to Gogol's nose, his story of the same title ("Nose"), his grotesque style, and probably the name itself. Repeated sounds of the name are heard as if for the first time and could suggest the cacophony of Akakij Akakievič himself. Thus, Gogol's name used aesthetically serves Ivanov's poem on several levels at once.

Some other names appear in poems of less complex structure. Villon's name (p. 23), for example, is not used in the same way as that of Gogol's. In the poem in which it appears, Villon's name suggests his theme of death. Just as frequently the name is accompanied by some other borrowings from the same poet: ". . . où sont les neiges d'antan?" It is a modern poem constructed on the principle of the irony of the absurd. The name of Villon in the last line of the poem ("the senseless question / that Villon asked?") gives its

thematic significance to the poem and extends Ivanov's absurdity in its existential<sup>2</sup> meaning into the past and outside the limits of Russian literature.

Omar Khayyam's name (p. 37) also stands primarily for a thematic reference and is itself not treated ironically or grotesquely. However, it is couched in the irony that surrounds it in the poem. An already uneasy idyll of Omar Khayyam is in direct confrontation with a grotesque picture of death. And having incorporated so aptly his "grave" and the "worms of the grave" into the lines of the poem, Ivanov mockingly moves to another plane of discourse, wondering if in this life one should not "keep quiet about the most important things." But what he seems to say and what he does with his poem are two different things, and there is the main tension of the irony, which is aptly supported by the name Omar Khayyam.

The names of Leont'ev and Tjutčev (p. 65) appear as ironic symbols of an invalid aestheticism, colored by the words "trifles of this life" (*ětož žizni pustjaki*) and by the complex structure of the entire poem. The tone of the poem is set in the introductory stanza in the words, "And Greece is covered with the graves, / As if the war had never been" (*I Grecija cvetet mogilami | Kak budto ne bylo vojny*). We find here oxymoronic and Gogolian sense in the *non sequitur*, in an absurd juxtaposition of syntax and meaning. The names of Leont'ev and Tjutčev, used together, are absurdly narrowed to a single meaning.

The device of a grotesque shifting of planes is revealed in a poem with Ivanov's own name (p. 42). The name appears only in connection with one detail – trousers that fly into eternity ("In radiance Ivanov's trousers / Fly and – eternity lies ahead. . .") and at the same time extends a literary perspective to Majakovsky in a close paraphrase of one of his poems ("The pants ran away from the terrified tailor"). Ivanov's poem abounds in frankly grotesque or surrealist images: a hand stretched out from an abyss, the dagger in the side of the tailor, white roses on his chest; all are reminiscent of the naiveté and fantastic realism of Marc Chagall or even more of Salvador Dali. Ivanov, it seems, is least inhibited in lending his own name to this world of fantasy and deformation.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Markov discusses existential features of Georgij Ivanov's poetry in his article "O poezii Georgija Ivanova," *Opyty* (New York, 1957), 83–92.

Less revealing are the poetic devices in the second iambic poem (p. 43) with Ivanov's name in it. An element of the absurd is here semantically emphasized in the word "ridiculous" (*Neverojatno do smešnogo*) as frequently occurs with Ivanov. But the comedy is always so near the tragedy, that it resembles the grotesque. The transformations of captain Ivanov are both comic and tragic and are finally resolved into "nothingness."

Three names seem to serve best the purposes of Ivanov's new parody built on absurdity and the grotesque: Gogol', Ivanov, and Lermontov. An iambic poem with Lermontov's name is an apposite example of Ivanov's own technique. On one level Ivanov's poem (p. 57) is a direct parody of Lermontov's poem, "I walk alone," to which Ivanov returns a second time and in a very different way. Words, a phrase, and a line slightly paraphrased are taken from Lermontov "Fog . . . The Wilderness senses God's Presence . . . Lermontov alone sets out on the road" (*Tuman . . . Pustynja vmemlet Bogu . . . Odin vyxodit na dorogu*). If Ivanov's poem is a variation on Lermontov's poem, then it is only on one theme — song-melody — from Lermontov's several themes of road, solitude, death, and song. Ivanov's theme of melody-song is developed and enclosed between the words *melodija* at the beginning, and *zvenja* at the end. But already by the choice of the mixed iambic meter Ivanov challenges the entire cycle of poems written under the influence of Lermontov's "I walk alone" in trochaic pentameter. Professor Taranovsky, in one of his articles,<sup>3</sup> devotes considerable attention to Lermontov's cycle in connection with trochaic pentameter which he considers suitable for the dynamic theme of the road. Iambic, on the other hand, seems to be more suitable for Ivanov's modern parody and his theme of song. Thus, Ivanov's poem debunks Lermontov's poem and builds on it at the same time. The borrowing is immediately identified by Lermontov's name in the last lines, but there is more to it than that. The image is created by Ivanov himself from the fragments introduced in the preceding stanza. Thus, it is not the conventionally known poet Lermontov that Ivanov gives us in his poem but an image conjured up by Ivanov for his own purposes. The "r" of the name itself, emphasized

<sup>3</sup> Kirill Taranovskij, "O vzaimootnošenii stixotvornogo ritma i tematiki," *American Contributions to the Fifth International Congress of Slavists* (The Hague, 1963), 287-322.

in the last two lines, helps penetrate the screen of the preceding stanzas and allows the sudden phantom to emerge, as if out of the "fog." The motif of "fog" is as important with Ivanov as it is with Lermontov who, with his clanking spurs, suddenly appears at the end of this poem. He and his spurs are pushed to the very foreground, in a manner not unlike that in which Gogol's "elongated" spectres appear at the end of *Dead Souls* or *The Overcoat*. The figure of Lermontov in this poem appears fantastic not only in the lyrical but also in the grotesque sense. The lyric and the grotesque have many elements in common. The ending of lyrical poems is frequently a simile, or a metaphor. In traditional poetry, however, lyrical deformation is hardly noticeable, while in Ivanov's poem it is put into relief. And this famous name becomes appropriate poetic material in the hands of this modern artist.

Our division of Ivanov's poems into two groups – of trochaic and iambic poems – for the purpose of analysis is on the whole undermined by the ambiguity which permeates all Ivanov's poetic world. We have seen that his trochaic poems with elements of homage or reverence for poets or their poetry were not free of irony and parody, more typical of the iambic group. Even some names appear in both groups, as for example Lermontov's or Ivanov's own name. The main difference between the two groups, which only very precariously could be divided into homage poems and parody poems, is that the names of poets in the trochaic group remain more autonomous; they are less directly used for new poetic purposes than the names in the iambic group. In the trochaic poems Ivanov more directly dwells on the past. In the iambic poems he is much more in the present both semantically and in his technique. The freshness of his entire approach is much more evident in his iambic poems.

Ivanov's choice of names, predominantly from among the modern poets or the more or less direct precursors of modern poetry, to a great extent circumscribes his own poetic world. However, Ivanov uses older poets' names as only a modern and contemporary poet can use them. His employment of them goes beyond any direct frame of reference. As a poet he focuses on the name-words. He either fragments them, adds direct meaning, or simply deforms them according to his purposes. All this is accomplished in close agreement with modern themes of the new

awareness, a new image of the poet in the contemporary world, as well as with the frequent modern technique of irony and the grotesque.

Of the entire poetic heritage of the past the names alone can render as much meaning and be as concise in the expressive force. Ivanov, a modern craftsman, can reduce the significance of poet's names to a specific reference or expand them to include poetic history in the larger sense. And frequently, to borrow Ivanov's own expression, the images of poets behind their names become "portraits without resemblance."

Ivanov in his use of names of poets fully participates in the modern objectivistic and consciously artistic attitude. His innovations are rooted in traditional poetry and directly include older poets' names. He owes much to Gogol' and Lermontov. Yet tradition becomes only raw material, and the names of poets exquisite toys in the hands of this modernist.

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