

Summary
Evolutions of Theory.
Biologism in Modernist Russian Literary Scholarship

The monograph provides an archaeology of modern literary scholarship reconstructed against the background of intellectual history of East European modernism. From a vertiginous abundance of concepts, doctrines, ideas and experiments, there emerges an outline of a system whole where scientific languages co-exist with mythological thinking, knowledge reunites with faith, nature merges with spirit, life fuses with creation, and ideological monoglossia is conquered by scholarly and artistic heteroglossia. Local congestions of details build up to an “analytical picture” (in Filonov’s sense of this term) of Russian literary theoretical biologism. Research shows that the phenomenon crystallized under the pressure of modern theoretical evolutionary biology, resonated with the vitalist tendencies of Western European philosophy and reflected the unique local traditions of Russian culture. Literary theoretical biologism is examined here as a general methodological and epistemological tendency of Russian modernism, and not – as it has often been characterized in the past – as a set of extravagant theoretical experiments or a bunch of random and rather accidental rhetorical ornaments dispersed in the differentiated languages of modernist literary theory.

Research indicates that as early as the first three decades of the 20th century, an overwhelmingly utopistic biologism spread widely through theoretical and historical reflections on literature and assumed, among others, the varied shapes of paleogenology and paleosemantics, morphology of genres, nomogenetic theory of folklore, the theory of philembryogenesis of tropes, literary mutationism, and versological Morganism. The multifarious forms of literary theoretical biologism are conceived of as an indispensable yet tiny part of the vast and internally dynamized biologistic style of thought that arguably united all areas of Russian humanities in the first half of the 20th century, and did not lose its impetus until quite recently. The actual knowledge of this whole can be compared with Dmitrii Mendeleev’s periodic table, which predicts the place and properties of the elements which had not yet been discovered and are still waiting in the archives of Russian modernism.

The proposed archaeology of East European literary scholarship has been narrowed to the “Russian formalist school” (also known as the “morphological school”) and Nikolai Marr’s school of “paleontological semantics” (the “genetic-sociological school”), represented, among others, by Olga Freudenberg, Izrail Frank-Kamenetskii, Vasilii Abaev, and Vladimir Propp. The reexamination of their methodological regulations, terminological thesauruses and modes of conceptualizing literary works in the context of biologism allows us to modify the existing image of the origins, development, internal characteristics and position of East- and Central European structuralism within the history of modern literary theoretical discourse. It also provides a new assessment of the methodological and epistemological foundations of the structuralist movement. Interestingly, it was biology that, to a large extent, superseded linguistics as a frame of reference for modern literary studies.

Not only did modern biological sciences provide the early 20th century literary scholarship with powerful methodological inspirations, but they also defined its disciplinary territory and the objectives of scholarly investigations. Natural studies supplied literary theoreticians with models for description, conceptual schemata and patterns for categorising literary phenomena. Biology also stimulated and shaped the theoretical imagination of the Russian literary scholars. The unprecedented density and unique hybridization of concepts, terms and languages shared both by modern biologists and literary theoreticians of the first three decades of the 20th century frequently render it impossible to separate *Kulturwissenschaft* from *Naturwissenschaft* and differentiate between the strict biological terminology and metaphorical/catachretic (“abusive”) use of scientific jargon in literary studies discourse.

The monograph’s introduction, *From the Archaeology of Literary Knowledge*, discusses the methodological framework, which incorporates Ludwik Fleck’s history of thought styles. Historical-comparative epistemology informs a number of contemporary literary theoretical projects in anthropology, which investigate the complex processes of cultural memory and are predominantly oriented towards historical semantics of concepts. The introductory chapter also provides a summary of the previous conceptualizations of the phenomenon of biologism in East- and Central European humanities of the early 20th century. Among the most important are those of A. Pomorski (*Duchowy proletariusz. Przyczynek do dziejów lamarkizmu społecznego i rosyjskiego kosmizmu XIX–XX wieku (na marginesie antyutopii Andrieja Płatonowa)*, 1996); P. Sériot (*Structure et totalité: Les origines intellectuelles du structuralisme en*

Europe centrale et orientale, 1999); A. Vucinich (*Darwin in Russian Thought*, 1988); and P. Steiner (*Russian Formalism: A Meta-poetics*, 1984). The author pays close attention to the unstable range of the concepts of modernism/postmodernism in East European cultural milieus. The monograph is then further divided into four parts, entitled respectively: *Between the Old and New Biologisms*, *Prestructuralism and Anti-Darwinism*, *Paleontologists' Summer* and, finally, *Morphologism: An Attempt at (Re)constructing a Certain Concept within Literary Studies*.

The first, most extensive part of the monograph provides an overview of the cultural and historical roots of literary theoretical biologism in modernist Russia, starting from Goethenian morphology and Schellingian nature philosophy, and moving via Positivist naturalism to Neo-Romantic vitalist trends in Western European philosophy and biology. An extensive study of the biologist assumptions of Russian intellectual culture considerably changes the concept of the all-European range of the anti-positivist (and simultaneously antinaturalist) breakthrough in the humanities, which has been passed on by eurocentric historians of science. It calls for the revision of the canonical anti-positivist exponents, such as the epistemological and methodological emancipation of cultural studies (*Kulturwissenschaften*) from natural studies (*Naturwissenschaften*). Research proves that the division of knowledge into the natural sciences and the humanities, heralded by the Baden Neo-Kantian school of Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, was neither definite nor conclusive. The anti-positivist turn by no means excluded the humanists' exploitation of biological concepts and methodologies, but instead redefined the relation between the two disciplines, according to the new self-awareness of the humanities and modern self-knowledge of the natural sciences.

Prestructuralism and Anti-Darwinism reveals close correlations between Russian modernist literary scholarship and anti-Darwinian theories of biological evolution entangled in complex relations with the Marxist orthodoxy of the first half of the 20th century. The proposed overview of the concepts of literary evolution demonstrates that prestructuralism was deeply embedded in debates over fundamental epistemological and ontological questions posed simultaneously in *Lebensphilosophie*, theoretical biology, and in the socio-ideological discourse of post-revolutionary Russia.

Paleontologists' Summer provides a methodological and ideological overview of the interdisciplinary "semantic paleontology" and the history of folklore, which emerged under the influence of Nikolai Marr's linguistic doctrine known as Japhetidology. Remarkably enough, not until recently have theoretical and methodological problems of "cultural paleontology"

been adequately documented and estimated. The dominance of Marrism between 1930 and 1950 in Russian linguistics and cultural studies, and Stalin's critique of Marrism in 1950, precluded the development of a systematic body of historical knowledge of the Marr school and its disciples. Special attention is paid to Olga Freudenberg's literary theoretical *zaum*, which assimilates both Lev Berg's nomogenesis, Ernst Cassirer's philosophical principles and Marxist linguistics.

The last chapter of the monograph attempts to reconstruct the assumptions and systematise the varieties Russian morphologism. Resting on Goethean morphology, it focused on issues of internal structure and the evolution of literary forms. Research has indicated that there are two essential branches of the Russian morphologism. The first includes mechanicism in its three varieties: anatomic, physiological, and holistic. The second, anti-mechanicist, branch can be further divided into Goethean transformationism, literary aromorphoses and the Paleontologies. The latter occurred in two varieties: Lamarckian paleoembryological morphologism and the paleontology of folklore, which emerged under the influence of the Darwinian theory of adaptation.

The monograph's conclusion, entitled *The Locks of Tartu*, presents the biologically-oriented "Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics" of the second half of the 20th century as a "sluice-gate" for the utopian and totalising biologism of early Russian modernism. Vyacheslav Ivanov's studies on the propensity of the brain and human culture for asymmetry, and Yurii Lotman's concepts of the semiosphere and the explosive evolution of culture, are the examples *contre coeur* of the new version of the Russian biologism. Remarkably, it is the Tartu and Moscow semioticians who took Olga Freudenberg, Boris Yarkho, Vladimir Propp and other biologists across the borders of the mythogenic zone of Russian modernism in the first part of the 20th century, and prepared the soil for their recontextualization in the international field of the humanities.