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Jonathan Stone. *The Institutions of Russian Modernism: Conceptualizing, Publishing, and Reading Symbolism.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017. 320 pp. $39.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8101-3572-7.

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Like the historical epochs in which they occur, the great isms of literary history are often reduced to simplified definitions, publication dates, author/hero name-dropping, and the occasional summary of an important piece of prose or poetry. While such accounts are certainly useful for a quick introduction to a literary epoch, they tend to overlook the complexity, ambiguity, and multifaceted nature of any given era of literary production. In *The Institutions of Russian Modernism: Conceptualizing, Publishing, and Reading Symbolism*, Jonathan Stone sheds light on the Silver Age of Russian literature by presenting new perspectives on the development of Symbolism from the 1890s to the 1910s. One of the main goals of Stone's ambitious monograph is to show that Russian Symbolism was not an overnight success, directly adapted from its European forebears. Instead, Stone illuminates how Russian Symbolism is the product of its institutions and the people involved in their making.

In his introductory chapter, Stone notes how former publications on Russian Symbolism have sought to define its conceptual identity by focusing primarily on its aesthetic representation. Stone, on the other hand, contends that Symbolism can only be fully understood by looking at the interplay between the conceptual components of its aesthetics and its material production. Stone's research incorporates theories of literature as a social institution, considers the centrality of the reader vis-a-vis the text, and addresses the idealism behind the aesthetic vision of Symbolism. Stone also touches on the production history of Russian literary journals at the turn of the century, the personal networks of authors and editors, and the enterprises that brought Symbolist poetry to the public. *The Institutions of Russian Modernism* approaches the Symbolist aesthetic by examining "issues of the agency of editors and publishers, the commercial aspects of producing and selling Symbolism, the question of establishing a value system by which it could be judged, the training of a Symbolist reader, [and] the organization and material realization of Symbolist poetry" (p. 9). It is from this angle that Stone defines Symbolism as "the sum of the people and practices responsible for mediating between the act of artistic production and its reception by the reader," and further claims that "Symbolism was an institutional affiliation as much as it was an artistic identity, a factor that seems to have been part of the movement's very inception" (p. 11).

These two approaches to the study of literary history—one more conceptually grounded, the other more historical—organize the book's struc-

ture of three parts and six chapters. Chapters 1 and 2, gathered under the rubric "Response, Imitation, and Parody," focus on the early history of writing, reading, and responding to Symbolism in Russia. The next two chapters constitute part 2, "Fashioning Symbolism," and trace the process and significance of how the Russian Symbolists took control over the entire process involved in producing and distributing Symbolist books. In part 3, "Framing Symbolism," chapters 5 and 6 show how the Symbolists strived to make their works comprehensible to the public through book illustrations, and by trying to make the many faces of Symbolism appear as a unified whole.

The Institutions of Russian Modernism thus aims to see literary history and analysis in connection with the material reality in which literature is produced. In chapter 1, Stone argues that Symbolism's entry into the Russian public sphere in the early 1890s is not a straightforward narrative but rather one marked by ambivalence. Stone uses the French literary scene as a parallel and notes how, in the early days of Symbolism, knowing whether a given text sought to embrace the Symbolist aesthetic in a sincere fashion—or whether it was meant to mock it—could be a challenging task for an untrained reader. Rather than focusing on the author's intention, Stone privileges the reader's encounter with the Symbolist text, an encounter which potentially renders a given text double: always ingrained in a parodic text lies the model text that is being parodied. Focusing especially on Aleksandr Emel'ianov-Kokhanskii's book *Bared Nerves* (*Obnazhennye nervy*, 1895) and the third issue of *Russian Symbolists (Russkie* simvolisty, 1895), Stone contends that the simultaneity of the parodic and the earnest decadent text became crucial to the reader's encounter with Symbolism: "parody and literary innovation served complementary roles in the development of Russian modernism" (p. 67).

While the book's first chapter highlights the reader's encounter with Symbolist texts that entered the Russian scene in the 1890s, chapter 2 focuses on the making and publication of the 1894 issue of *Russian Symbolists*. Crucial to this story is Valerii Briusov, who Stone argues "melded the acts of considering Symbolism as an aesthetic and as an object that must be gathered together in order to fulfill its artistic function" (p. 77). It was through *Russian Symbolists* that a distinct sphere was created for Symbolism to exist on its own terms. Although only three issues were published, Stone claims that *Russian Symbolists* should be considered the first real institution of Russian modernism. Through *Russian Symbolists*, networks were created that came to define what Russian Symbolism should and should not be, and at the center was Briusov as editor, poet, and visionary: "the editor's discretion emerges as the deciding factor for what is and is not Symbolism" (p. 98).

Chapter 3, "Making the Symbolist Book," focuses on the publishing house Skorpion. Stone claims that Skorpion's notability as a literary institution "comes in part from its residing on the cusp of both a major conceptual shift in the role of art and the artist and the advent of technology that permitted them to exercise greater control over the printing of their works" (p. 106). Furthermore, the collective of individuals working together to publish a given text becomes more important than the individual author and the isolated reader, and also strengthens the role of the editor. Through the process of establishing their own networks of publication, the Symbolists could themselves ascribe the rules of the new art, fashion their own readership, and stand forth as a cohesive group of poets working from similar aesthetic principles.

In chapter 4, Stone investigates Skorpion's efforts to establish a sense of unity amidst the aesthetic diversity found among Symbolist poets. As Stone astutely notes: "The concept of Symbolism was established in Russia through the act of publishing Symbolism" (p. 133). Using Charles Baude-

laire's *The Flowers of Evil* (*Les Fleurs du mal,* 1857) as a starting point, Stone explores how the Russian Symbolists were concerned with presenting each book of poetry as a totality tied together by a secret architecture which the reader could learn to decipher. At the turn of the century, the Symbolists had managed to cultivate an audience of like-minded readers. This allowed the Symbolists to start publishing works that, despite their individual characteristics, were still linked through the association of being Symbolist. Stone here shows how the Symbolists solidified their presence on the literary stage by advertising their group identity and their self-created Symbolist canon.

Chapter 5 further explores the strategies for promoting and marketing Symbolist books. Specifically, Stone explains how book covers came to be the public face of Symbolism while also reflecting the literary aesthetic of the book itself. By analyzing numerous book covers, Stone maintains that they assisted in creating a representational interpretation of the ephemeral qualities of Symbolist poetry: "The combination of cover and poems reflects Skorpion's presence in two spheres of modernism—its material production and its cultural production. It allows the work to skirt the boundary between esoteric or elitist and commercial and broadly accessible, thus serving its purpose as both advertisement and artistic statement" (p. 199). Within this context, Skorpion also functions as an institution that mediates between the work and the audience, the private and the public.

In the last chapter, Stone highlights the turn toward explaining Symbolism through its authors, a shift he coins "biographical Symbolism." Paying special attention to the years 1910 and 1911, Stone problematizes how the Symbolists found competition in the rising Acmeist movement. As Stone points out, the emergence of Symbolist literary history and biographical Symbolism "are at once symptoms of Symbolism's crisis and the key to its survival in the wake of that crisis" (p. 206). By 1910, Symbolism came to be looked at from a retrospective angle which sought to compose a linear narrative of its history, centered around the main Symbolist authors and their personal lives. Stone contends that this marks a shift in the Symbolist's approach to the reader, as comprehensibility now became the most important component of Symbolist publications. When new publishing houses such as Musaget entered the literary scene, the reader was no longer required or expected to participate as an active co-maker of Symbolism because Symbolism was no longer in-the-making. In 1910, for instance, Lev Kobylinskii (using the pseudonym Ellis) published a literary history of Symbolism, simply called ***Russian Symbolists (Russkie simvolisty)***. Stone notes that Ellis's readings of authors such as Konstantin Bal'mont, Briusov, and Andrei Belyi "skirt the boundary between Symbolist and non-Symbolist readers and consequently reinvent the ways in which both perceive Symbolism" (p. 215). Stone further maintains that the publication of collected works by individual authors marked an epistemological shift in which the reader's experience of the text is guided by biographical and contextual details about the authors at hand. "Consequently," Stone writes, "Russian Symbolism is propagated not as an endlessly evolving and tenuously harmonious collective, but as a precise and perfected monument to Russian literature's past" (p. 239). Ellis's Apollonian approach to Russian Symbolism had implications for how Symbolism came to be understood and interpreted by readers and scholars alike, and yet Stone compellingly argues why Ellis's account is just another turn in the complex and often messy process of making and remaking Russian Symbolism.

The Institutions of Russian Modernism takes into consideration both the conceptual imagination and idealism behind Symbolist poetry, as well as its physical materialization in journals and books. As Stone notes in his conclusion, "Russian Symbolism's history and conceptual development

was wrapped up in the story of its appearance in print, institutions of publication, and presentation to the reader" (p. 241). Stone crafts a multifaceted picture of these developments, allowing a wide set of new questions to emerge. The book points out productive pathways for approaching and thinking about Russian culture and literature, and participates in the reimagining of modernist studies. The core of Stone's project is interdisciplinary; it puts disciplines such as history, literary theory, art history, and cultural history into productive dialogue with each other. While Stone for the most part balances the different disciplines in a persuasive manner, more room should have been afforded to unpack some of the theoretical concepts upon which the book's argument relies. The terms "institution," "reader," and "reception" are used rather loosely, making it hard to decipher whether the author thinks of them as philosophical constructs or as real, historical entities. In the book's strongest sections, Stone sees the Symbolist aesthetic in relation to the development of the Russian marketplace—a point which naturally had great implications for how Russian Symbolism developed throughout the 1890s to the 1910s. These historical details help explain the changing conventions of Symbolist aesthetics and could therefore have been explored in greater detail. One also wishes that some of the chapters had been further refined by firmer editing, as some information is repeated throughout and thus seems redundant. Furthermore, Stone engages minimally with scholarship published during the last decade. Nevertheless, Stone still challenges the neat narratives about Russian Symbolism that have dominated scholarship. By revealing the constructedness of these narratives, ***The Institutions of Russian Modernism*** also reveals the constructedness of Russian Symbolism as such.

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