



A YEAR OF LEARNING BORIS GASPAROV

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1. Personal Experience and Achievement.

Judging solely by the volume of what I have produced during this year at the Wiko, it fell somewhat short of expectations one could have for such an extended segment of free time and ideal working conditions. I have done some additional research (mostly related to German matters) and written about a third of the book that was my principal project here; the book's preliminary title: "Prophesying in Part: Romantic Culture of Fragmentation and Affinities." I have also written a large survey article on European Romanticism,

which was of principal importance for shaping my book project, as well as a few other articles and conference papers.

My progress in writing a new book was somewhat hampered by the necessity to attend to a host of editorial and technical matters concerning several earlier works: my book *Speech, Memory, and Meaning: Intertextuality in Everyday Language* appeared during my stay at the Wiko (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010); another book, *Freedom and Mystery: Ferdinand de Saussure's Philosophy of Language and Its Early Romantic Antecedents*, has been accepted by Columbia University Press, while a shorter version was commissioned for a French edition by the Edition Seuil.

Most importantly, however, this year has been for me, first and foremost, a year of learning and strategic thinking about my work. In this sense, I feel that what I have received at the Wiko is an intellectual momentum whose impact will undoubtedly last for quite a few years ahead.

First, during this year I have made a crucial rethinking and expanding of my principal project concerning Romanticism. My original intention was to show an extensive context of European Romantic culture for the œuvre of Pushkin and, consequentially, to show the place of Russian literature of the Alexandrine epoch in European culture at large. However, during my first months at the Wiko, thanks to the ideal possibilities for research and a highly stimulating cosmopolitan cultural environment I have found here, I felt encouraged to rethink my project on a larger scale. Its emphasis has now shifted to the philosophical foundations of Romanticism and their impact on early nineteenth-century European culture.

My principal argument is that the metaphysical ideas and cognitive strategies of early Romantics, while failing to create a lasting philosophical tradition, transformed themselves into what could be called the Romantic consciousness. In this sense, the metaphysical concerns of early Romanticism maintained their presence, albeit implicitly, in a variety of new artistic forms and genres that proliferated during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Above all, the heritage of early Romanticism created a dynamic environment in which various ideas and motifs were “floating around” in the European cultural space, migrating from one national tradition or one artistic medium to another and undergoing manifold creative transformations in the process. In this sense, Romanticism became the first true all-European cultural movement, with multiple centers and multi-directional dialogues – a decentralized environment in which such national cultures as

Russian, Polish, Italian, and Finnish had an integral part alongside French, German, and English.

Second, together with Galin Tihanov, and with crucial support from Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, I organized a workshop dedicated to the study of international cultural trends at the turn of the 1930s. Our principal thesis was that the shift toward a populist and epically oriented, nationally conscious art, which was experienced at the time by many artists in different countries, was not merely a product of political and economic pressures, but emerged as a genuine aesthetic trend, a widespread reaction to about twenty years of domination by hard-core avant-garde aesthetics. The workshop explored the phenomenon of “fatigue” with the avant-garde fragmentariness of artistic form and the depersonalization of the authorial voice, a trend that manifested itself in such diverse phenomena of the time as the evolution of the style of such composers as Prokofiev and Shostakovich, the new rise of the social and historical novel, the return of the narrative element in visual arts, etc.

The group’s monthly meetings were regularly attended by 10–14 participants and featured nine papers. Its work culminated in a two-day workshop in June, co-sponsored by the Freie Universität Berlin and Columbia University, in which scholars from Germany, Austria, America, and Russia took part. I am determined to continue this work, both in my personal writing and by organizing seminars and conferences on the subject. There are preliminary plans to continue an international exploration of this subject under the sponsorship of the Harriman Institute at Columbia.

Above all, I had a tremendous experience of contacts with the German academic and literary world, largely thanks to a rich cultural environment that coalesces at the Wiko. Among the highlights of this experience was my work as an outside evaluator for the program “Clusters of Excellence” at the Freie Universität Berlin. Here at the Kolleg, I have received much encouragement and guidance, particularly from Martin Mosebach and Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, in my readings in twentieth-century German literature.

2. Academic Life at the Wiko.

I would like to make a few suggestions about the proceedings of Wiko Tuesday colloquia. To create a substantial dialogue among scholars in the sciences and the humanities is a challenging task, and I am not fully satisfied with how it has been addressed during this year’s sessions. Particularly the scientists found themselves at a disadvantage because of

the need to simplify and popularize for a diverse audience; however, the problem affected presentations in the social sciences and the humanities as well, perhaps in a less demonstrable way because the natural scientists could not use their professional language, while presentations by social scientists and humanists needed only a slight explanatory adjustment of their presentations. As a humanist, I sensed a contradiction between my inability to communicate with scientists in their professional language, on the one hand, and the feeling of being intellectually shortchanged by popularized presentations of their research, on the other. I must confess that richly illustrated, at times stunningly anthropomorphic narratives about the habits of social insects left me with an aftertaste of a fairy tale.

To remedy this situation, I want to suggest some general re-orientation of the colloquia. In my opinion, emphasis should be put on general methodological problems more than on the substantial content of the presented projects. I envision people talking about how they formulate the intellectual goals of their study, what the methodological limitations and pitfalls of the taken approach are, what the current trends and controversies concerning their subject are, and where their own approach stands in this context. Moreover, there is a better chance that such presentations could elicit coherent general discussion, rather than the arbitrary “question-and-answer” sessions that prevailed at this year’s meetings. The paper-giver and the chair could help to shape the coming discussion by posing beforehand some questions of principal importance as its guidelines. Certainly, I do not offer any universal recipes. But it would be beneficial, I believe, if each group of Fellows could discuss such problems at the beginning of their term, to work out proceedings that would suit them best.

Another suggestion: I strongly believe that there should be more colloquium papers in German, followed by a bilingual discussion. My own intention in the beginning was to prepare and deliver my talk in German; I felt that such an experience could be of invaluable value for my further contacts with the German academic environment. However, after I had seen virtually all of my German colleagues delivering their papers in English, I felt that it would be presumptuous on my part to do otherwise.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the staff of the Kolleg not only for being tremendously helpful and supportive, but above all for creating a rich and dynamic intellectual environment for all of us. It has made this year at the Wiko unforgettable and highly consequential for my scholarly work and academic life in the future.