

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****TO THE HISTORY OF AESTHETIC COMMUNICATION IN
RUSSIA: READERS OF THE “VESY”**

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Abstract

At present, both in scientific practice and in the modern media discourse, a new categorical apparatus is actively being formed, its special case being the aesthetic communication concept (AC). It should be noted that an important stage in the AC concept formation was the activity of periodicals of a new type – magazines-manifestos of the early twentieth century, including the symbolist magazine «Vesy». The history of the «Vesy» journal has repeatedly attracted researchers’ attention and the role of the magazine-manifest «Vesy» in the fate of such a unique phenomenon of Russian culture as Russian symbolism is deeply appreciated. Meanwhile, the magazine-manifest «Vesy» played an important role both in the integration of the national literary process with European artistic practice, and in the development of the readers’ aesthetic consciousness. The communicative expansion of the aesthetic experience of the «Vesy» magazine generated a number of deep creative dialogues, controversies and was manifested in the formation of a special type of aesthetic utterance - a receptive text, authored by the readers of «Vesy». The editorial portfolio of the «Vesy» magazine has more than 300 storage units which contain unique material for the study of AC in the early twentieth century. In this article, this material is analyzed and presented for the first time.

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1. Introduction

Recently, the humanities have been paying increasing attention to the sociology of literary life. Thus, in works of a historical and literary nature, the topics of literary process communicative features and aesthetic communication specifics are increasingly being touched upon. This also applies to the study of one of the most striking and important periods in the development of culture, which is commonly called the era of Russian Art Nouveau.

The aesthetic power of Russian modernism turned out to be so great that its potential has not yet been exhausted and it still determines the development of modern culture in its own way. This is connected not only with the artistic and axiological discoveries of Russian Art Nouveau, but also with its communicative strategies, which were clearly indicated in the history of Russian journalism at the beginning of the 20th century.

2. Problem Statement

The study is devoted to the unique phenomenon of literary and, in general, cultural life of the early twentieth century, the magazine-manifest "Vesy", which arose, on the one hand, as a result of the design of group art ideologies, on the other - due to the evolution of the "ordinary Russian magazine", namely the "thick" Russian magazine of the 19th century or the "classical" type magazine. "Vesy" carried out the new art's aesthetic expansion and implemented a fundamentally new communicative strategy too.

3. Research Questions

The main issues of this research are:

- 3.1. What aesthetic communication type does the symbolist magazine-manifest "Vesy" belong to?
- 3.2. What is the specificity of readers' perception of symbolism as a new literary phenomenon?
- 3.3. What exactly are the features of the "Vesy" readers' communicative aspirations?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study the personal archives of S. Polyakov, the editor-publisher of the "Vesy" magazine (Polyakov, n.d.). They represent a significant layer of "receptive literature" that arose on the basis of a new communicative platform of the symbolist manifesto magazine.

5. Research Methods

The system-typological and receptive aesthetics methods along with cultural-historical approach were used as the main ones while conducting this research. A biographical commentary was added if required.

6. Findings

At present, a new categorical apparatus is being actively formed both in scientific practice and in modern media discourse. New concepts, such as aesthetic communication (Sidorova, 2015), receptive literature (Buharkin, 2017; Davydov et al., 2018), communicative practices and strategies (Voskresenskaya, 2015), addressed to the study of the history of literature, pose the problem of pragmatics and the sociology of literary life, the institutionalization of the literary process (Rejtlat & Ulanov, 2019; Stone, 2017), including the problem of studying the readership, their reception and the phenomenon of reading as such (Chekalov, 2020; Kuzoro, 2015). An important stage in the formation of aesthetic communication and the phenomenon of receptive literature in Russia was the functioning of new types of periodicals, manifesto magazines of the early twentieth century. Among them was the symbolist magazine “Vesy” («La Balance») (1904-1909), which was the first literary – art periodical of a new type, integrating national and world modernist cultural experience and uniting supporters of the “new art” around itself.

The history of the “Vesy” magazine, its editorial life, its significance for the development of Russian literature, the creative dialogues and controversy brought about by the publications in this periodical continue to be the subject of close attention and detailed study (Prihod'ko, 2007). It is known that each issue of the magazine contained a large amount of information of a very different nature. At the same time, it is important that “Vesy” carried out an aesthetic expansion of new art on a fundamentally new communicative platform. To understand its features a short digression into the history of Russian journalism should be made.

The second half of the XIX century was marked by the indisputable predominance of the Russian "thick" magazines such as "Russky Vestnik" (1856-1906), "Russkoye Bogatstvo" (1876-1918), "Vestnik Evropy" (1866–1918), "Russkaya Mysl" (1880-1918) and others among the printed periodicals. These magazines of the syncretic type set the tone for public life and, at the same time generated the literary process in Russia. The Russian "thick" journal functioned as one organism, as a laboratory in which various "ideological trends" were advanced and implemented through the development of various spheres of life. Despite all the variety of subjects of the "thick" Russian magazine, it still demonstrated its unity of approach to assessing reality while the aesthetic principle turned out to be subordinate to a certain "ideological direction". The communicative component of the activity of "thick" Russian journals was mainly reduced to tasks of enlightenment and education. It is no coincidence that the definition of a “periodic encyclopedia” has been entrenched in this type of periodicals. The “classical” type Russian magazine not only educated its readers. In addition, it gave them a “spiritual focus” for perceiving reality, a form of public orientation, and an integral system of worldview in the long run. Meanwhile, the basis of the communication that the "thick" Russian magazines built with their readers was a "monologue", and its character was distinguished by a certain utilitarianism and authoritarianism.

Russian modernism waged a desperate struggle with this type of communication, and its first representatives, the Symbolists, built their relations with the readership on fundamentally different communicative grounds. Bryusov's (1904a) "Keys to Secrets", an article-manifesto, which opened the first issue of "Vesy" in 1904, was full of new rhetoric. Bryusov (1904a) wrote:

And why don't readers tear this telegraph thread between themselves and the artist's soul? What do they find in the feelings of a stranger who probably lived many years ago in another country? To unravel what the artist's dark hunger and in return the hunger of his listener and spectator are based on is the true task of the science of art. And this scholastic answer has no clue: "art is useful because it provides communication of feelings; and communication of feelings is desirable for us, because we have a special instinct of sociability (p. 8).

The change of rhetoric was clearly manifested in the opening editorial "To Readers", where the following statement was made: "Vesy is convinced that the "new art" is the extreme point that humanity has so far reached in its path, that it's the "new art" that concentrates the best forces of the spiritual life of the earth, that, bypassing it, people have no other way forward, to new, yet higher ideals" (To readers, 1904, p. 3). In this statement, the absence of a demarcation line between authors, employees, magazine editorial board and readers is noteworthy: they are united by a single concept of "humanity" that is moving towards higher ideals. Characteristically, this new rhetoric was addressed to a new type of reader, whom K. D. Balmont would call the "sensible" reader (as cited in Don, 1904, p. 62).

It should be noted that in the materials published by "Vesy", its analytical articles and reviews, there was an appeal to the readers, to their perceptions, impressions and pleasures as an important component of aesthetic communication: "*The reader, we would have run gray-haired with fear out of the room. He didn't ...* ", exclaims Rozanov (1904) in his article titled "There is some secret" recalling Gogol's "Viy" (p. 18) (Here and up to the end of the text the italics is ours. – T.I., G.P.). Or: "*With a sense of true disgust, we draw the readers' attention to the shameful pages in the March issue of "Vestnik Evropy", written by someone hiding under the name Eug. L. "* " - wrote Bal'mont, (1904) in his "letter to the editor" titled "The Mask Down," emphasizing at least the disrespectful attitude of the famous magazine to its readership (p. 79). Or: "*Bely is waiting for a reader to forgive him his mistakes, who would surrender with him to the insane waterfall of his golden and fiery dreams, would throw himself into this pearl-frothed abyss. Vyach. Ivanov's reader should treat his poems with thoughtful seriousness, should interrogate his work, and should drill these often inhospitable, sometimes bizarre ore rocks knowing that silver springs of pure poetry will pour out from there,*" Bryusov (1904b) addresses the reader in a review of poetic books by Andrei Bely "Gold in Azure" and Vyach. Ivanov "Transparency" published by "Scorpion" in 1904 (pp. 61-62).

The frontal examination of the "Vesy" publications over the period of 1904–1905 revealed more than 300 appeals to readers on its pages, which actually covers almost half of the total number of journal publications of this period. And in the magazine materials dated 1905 the name of a special category of "Vesy" readers" arose which fixed the special status of the journal communication addressee not as some vague "public", but the most important component of aesthetic interaction, an accomplice in the literary and artistic process. Such an attitude towards the readership of the magazine, which called on its readers not to passively accept new art, but to run an active "dialogue" and co-create, had its consequences. The editorial portfolio of "Vesy", largely concentrated in S.A. Polyakov's personal archive, contains more than 300 storage units representing "Vesy" readers' appeals to the editorial office.

At one time Grechishkin (1980) gave a very detailed description of the correspondence of "Vesy" editorial board with their readers, but at the same time he abruptly and mainly negatively assessed this

collection of materials (p. 21). Meanwhile, it seems to us that we should take a closer look at this “literary product” regarding it not so much as an annoying epigone factor, but from the point of view of the result of an aesthetic communication which proved to be very consistent, and which “Vesy” was oriented to.

What we find noteworthy is the discursive component of the letters from those readers who ceased to feel part of “the public”, only timid “supplicants”. The letters to “Vesy” editors are from readers who “reject the aesthetic distance” (Samutina, 2017) and who feel like “authors” having responded to the call for dialogue and co-creation. Here are some illustrative examples.

A passage from an undated letter of Alekseev (n.d.), the author of a notebook with a handwritten text entitled “Evolution (From a Suicide’s Notes)” sent to “Vesy” editors:

«Dear Mr. Editor,

The other day I handed you the manuscript <...> entitled "Evolution". This notebook represents the <...> beginning which must be followed by a continuation. My idea is to depict the story of growth <...> the story of the liberation of the soul, which <...> rejects everything that is imposed on it from the outside - people, society, environment, circumstances; renounces those aspirations that are not its own aspirations, searches tirelessly for itself, approaches itself closer and closer, moves away from others <...> and finally ... finally, it feels light and free, it seems to her that it already knows what it needs to strive, it also knows how to strive, it anticipates the possibility of flight <...> Others, perhaps, will notice in my “Evolution” neither elevation nor decline, but they will see it simply as the record of wanderings; or they won’t see any story here at all, nothing but a series of moods <...> But it still seems to me that if my work is not the “story” I dreamed about, then, in any case, it is a true depiction of some mental states. Resembling a “human document”, a collection of raw materials more than any literary work, it may be able to interest those who are generally curious about inner life <...>. I kept my work just for myself for a long time, but finally there came the moment when I felt the need to hear someone else's opinion. <...> With utmost respect, Author» (Alekseev, n. d.).

From an undated letter of Voronovsky (n.d.), a resident of Feodosia, who sent 4 poems to the editor of “Vesy” (“Woman,” “Man,” “We,” “To the Sound of Bone Rumble ...”): “Dear Mr. Editor! I am sending you a few poems. Please, if possible, publish them in the №№ issues of your respected magazine.

If the poems are accepted, you assign a fee. I am aware that it’s not good; it does not honor me to ask for a fee, but the difficult financial conditions, which chronically, like an evil disease, gobble up our students’ strength, make me powerless, and humbly bowing my neck I am asking for a fee.

Another request, though a bold one. Would you be so kind, in case the poems were completely unsuitable, to tell me whether to write any further and whether I have any talent at all; – This is such a painful question for me that I approach it with horror, but there is no other way out than to ask you to help me. By my convictions, for I am an ardent mystic, I can please you with my poems, in which there is no reality of expressions, but only “nebula of symbolism”, as others say. Please, answer me, well, because I don’t have money for the return stamp, and by the time you answer - I hope – I’ll have some» (Voronovskij, n. d.).

From a letter by Mariyushkin (n.d.) from Chernigov dated back to September 1, 1906:

Dear Mr. Editor!

I enclose two poems. Would you be so kind as to give them some place on the pages of the "Vesy" magazine edited by you?

My ardent desire is to be a member of the respected periodical.

With a sincere desire to be of service.

Al. Mariyushkin» (Mariyushkin, n.d.).

The very rhetoric of these confidential epistolary appeals suggests that their authors were initially set up for dialogue with the editors. In some cases, among the letters to "Vesy" editorial office, peculiar "comrade-like" creative passages are also found. For example, a passage from a letter by Sereda from the town of Gatchina dated June 5, 1908:

«I am sending a "response" that has poured out of my heart to Gumilyov's poem, just received with the June issue of "Vesy". I would be very happy if my answer is placed in "Vesy" as soon as possible, while the threat of "glorious death" is still alive in the readers' minds.

I do not expect any fee since I am still a beginner for "Vesy", although I have written, write and will probably write quite often What for? "I am afraid of an inglorious life" and this is not the answer meant only for my "magic violin" fellow» (Sereda, 1908).

The last letter makes us discuss another important result of a new communication type carried out by the "Vesy" journal which is the emergence of a whole layer of the so-called "receptive literature", that is, texts written by readers as a direct response to publications in "Vesy".

So, the already mentioned Al. Mariushkin, a "Vesy" reader, sent to the editors of the "respected magazine" his poem "Twinkles" subtitled "K. D. Balmont" and actually representing a peculiar "rehash" of the poet-symbolist's lyrical manner.

We find an interesting example of a "receptive text" in an undated letter to the editor from L. P. Bogoyavlensky from Uglovka station of the Nikolaev railway, who attached his verses to the following explanation: "Dear Sir, I am sending these verses to the editorial office of your journal. Perhaps they can be published. The verses are provoked by Gippius' poems from the 12th issue of "Vesy" 1908. Although they are not imitations, Gippius's metres fettered my thought, and I involuntarily responded to them. Therefore, they are to be published signed with L. P-y". 7 poems were attached to the letter: "Evening", "Morning", "Truth (Nietzsche)", "To All who Seek when Powerlessness ...", "Thought", "In the Evening", "At a Masquerade" (Bogoyavlenskij, n.d.)

We would also like to draw attention to the vey figure of L. P. Bogoyavlensky as a characteristic representative of "'Vesy" provincial readers". Leonid Petrovich Bogoyavlensky (1877-?, after 1939) was a philologist, teacher, the Mogilev Theological Seminary graduate coming from the family of a priest P. N. Bogoyavlensky (1849? -?). According to the entries in "The Church Gazette" of the town of Valdai and the adjoining district dated 1896 belonging to The Novgorod Theological Consistory he graduated from the Novgorod Theological Seminary, was a priest of the Nativity Church at the Uglovka station of the Nikolaev

railway in the Valdai district of the Novgorod province and the religion teacher at the Uglovskaya Ministerial School. In L. P. Bogoyavlensky's poems it is difficult to find a direct thematic and figurative connection with the 5 poems by Gippius (1908) published in the journal, to which he refers in his letter. Such a connection is not always obvious even at the level of motifs (Gippius, 1908). Bogoyavlensky's poems are not a rehash of Z. N. Gippius's motifs, but a creative, rather original response to the source text.

Another noteworthy instance is the poetic message of N.V. Sereda (Victor Nikolich):

Ya boyus' besslavnoy zhizni. Pust' nagryanut
vse napasti.

V nashey vlasti, v nashey vlasti, skripkoy
strasti vozrodit'.

Siloy zvuka – chest' poruka! Vsem
volkam zatknuyu ya pasti,

Motshyu vzglyada, sily Ada mne ne
Trudno pobedit'.

Ne strashny mne chary, volki... No bezdushny
Lyudi, tolki...

Ya igrayu gimny Rayu, tsarstvy
svetlogo kontsa

Ya molyus' i zamirayu, - a krugom
prezrenno-kolki

B'yutsya Volki, duhi Ada! V
bitve struny ne sdayutsa,

Vsyakoy bure skripka rada: smert'
geroyam – nipochyom.

No – igrayu, zvuki l'yutsa... Vkrug
Lish holodno smeyutsa

Nad nenuzhnym, slishkom vyshnim,
v zhizni lishnim skripachom.

(Nikolich, 1908, p. 1)

In his letter, Victor Nikolich calls his poem "the answer" to Gumilyov's poem just received with the "Vesy" June issue. "Magic Violin" by Gumilev (1908) is meant. Besides, the imagery confirms that it is all a rehash of Gumilev's one. At the same time, Viktor Nikolich's poem is perceived not only as an "answer" to N. S. Gumilev, but also as an "answer" to "questions" (aesthetic, emotional and intellectual) posed by "Vesy".

7. Conclusion

The revealed layer of “receptive literature” is quite voluminous and is still waiting for a more detailed study. It is important to emphasize that the “receptive text” is an important part of the large “multitext” of Russian modernism that resulted from a special type of aesthetic communication.

The existence of both literary text itself and “receptive literature” (poetic “answers”, symbolic poems, prosaic sketch-revelations, “twilight motifs”, diary “evolutions”) of “Vesny” readers should be seen as the formation of a special subculture, which is characterized by the formation of a single media space as the most important condition for culture existence. And the modern aesthetics of transformations and quasimodeling which most important feature is “multiplicity” (Nechaeva, 2016), the transformation of a reader’s role in the literary process of the twentieth century (Golikova, 2016) are natural consequences of the development of aesthetic communication as an active dialogue with the reader.

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