
ON THE CONFERENCE “KUSKOVSKIE READINGS 2015” Moscow, 20—22 September 2015

It was a privilege to be present at this international conference, my first in Russia, guest of the Department of Foreign Languages at Moscow City University of Psychology and Education. Themes of the conference were Russian language and literature, philology, pedagogy and linguistics. Conference languages were Russian, English and Italian. There were many presentations by distinguished Russian scholars, on a variety of topics. Attention was paid, in the presentations on Russian themes, to moral and spiritual questions in current and older Russian literature. Marina Scherbakova, who headed a panel on problems of textual criticism, discussed St. Theophan, the giver of the library of the Greek theological school on the island of Halki. Ludmila Silina, who headed a panel on the spiritual and moral foundations of current Russian literature, gave a talk on Athanasius of Brest in the context of the literary tradition of the XVII century. Elena Konyavskaya headed the panel on moral searching in Old Russian literature, and gave a talk on the initial stage of the Old Russian book learning, in which she discussed the traditions established by V.V. Kuskov. Vladimir Voropaev discussed the origins of certain prayers in the Russian orthodox tradition. Another stimulating talk on Old Russian literature was given by Andrei Ranchin, who discussed the tale of Prince Igor Svyatoslavich's campaign against the Polovtsians from the Laurentian chronicle. Finally, Vladimir Kirillin discussed Isichasm and Russian literature of the XIV—XVI centuries. All of the talks were characterised by depth the intrinsic interest of the subjects, as well as by the lively presentations which gave rise to animated discussion in the question and answer sessions that followed their delivery.

On the linguistics side, Alla Minjar-Beloruicheva headed a panel on the Russian conceptosphere and the linguistic image of Russian in the world. Her own presentation covered the role of the concept in national political discourse. Talks from international guests covered various topics: firstly, middle-eastern politics, in the presentation of Yue Yang. She discussed the role of China in foreign affairs, arguing for the need to subject representations of the Asian giant to a closer analysis. Natalia Bludilina then discussed images of Poland in the works of a Russian nobleman, B.D. Sheremetyevo, who travelled in Poland at the end of the 17th century. Marinella Mondaini described the imaginary of Venice in Russian poetry, underlining the romantic but also fatal attraction for Russian authors of that particular Italian city. Paolina Mulé's talk on pedagogy traced the development of modern thinking from John Dewey to the present day, and was an attempt to engage her audience in a potentially fruitful dialogue on this topic. Finally, Douglas Ponton discussed metaphors in British political discourse, arguing for the importance of a critical linguistic approach. Metaphors are not neutral from the ideological point of view, he suggested, but rather tools inevitably involved in processes of political persuasion.

One of the special features of the conference related to the presentation of a book by the Italian Slavonic scholar Marcello Garzanitti «Biblical quotations in Church

Slavonic literacy». Professor Garzanitti also found time to accompany the foreign visitors on a visit to the State Historical Museum, where his illuminating commentary brought the exhibits to life.

At the conference, the sessions were ably chaired by Irina Dergacheva, dean of the Foreign Language faculty, and the organisation and facilities were first class. Translation services were provided for the benefit of guests, such as myself, lacking an adequate knowledge of Russian to follow the talks. The social programme included a visit to the museum-reserve «Kolomenskoye», the Tsar's summer residence, where guests were given a highly informative talk by an expert guide, in full Russian costume, explaining the religious significance of the many valuable relics on display. Many thanks to the organising committee: Irina Dergacheva, Ludmila Silina, Olga Rubtsova, Gulnara Baimurzaeva and Anna Sasim for their welcome, and for organizing a rich and varied social programme which gave us a real taste of Russian hospitality, culture and tradition, as well as helping us to find our feet in Russia's fascinating capital city. We are hopeful that this will be the first of many fruitful exchanges between scholars at our university, Catania in Sicily, and scholars from Russia. I was encouraged by the reception afforded some of our ideas, and I am sure that we have much to learn from Russian approaches to our various disciplines. I look forward to welcoming some of our new friends on their return visit to Italy in the near future, an invitation extended to Russian scholars from all institutions of further education, including the People's Friendship University of Russia.

Douglas Mark Ponton