

Poets Ivan Akhmetev and his wife, Tatiana Neshumova, are deservedly called the Guardians of Russian literature. They will be in Eugene, Oregon, at the invitation of the University of Oregon Libraries and Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies this fall to deliver three lectures in a series entitled “Literary Life in Totalitarian Society: Russia, Then and Now.” During their presentations they will also recite their own poems as well as those by other Russian poets. Their readings will be accompanied by fascinating anecdotes and stories that unveil their research on literature in a totalitarian society.

Tatiana Neshumova

Tatiana Neshumova is a Moscow poet and literary scholar; she has authored memoirs, and numerous books and articles on literature. In describing one aspect of her research and her reasons for pursuing it, Neshumova says:

“Maximilian Voloshin, a Silver Age poet, came to Moscow from Crimea in 1927. He was one of the presenters at Poetry Night, an organized event that was attended by his contemporaries Lev Gornung and Dmitrii Usov. Gornung and Usov decided to record Voloshin’s presentation, which included a story about an argument between Voloshin and Nikolai Gumilev over a mysterious poetess Cherubina de Gabriak.

“Thanks to Gornung and Usov’s efforts, we have access to this information today. This episode was personally important to me because I realized that I, too, live in history, and if I do not make any personal efforts to record today’s events, then much can be lost tomorrow. Realizing this, I began taking my camera to all poetry readings and events. We witness how current events and our daily life become history. In my archives, there are already unique records of very significant now-deceased poets Elena Shvarts and Vsevolod Nekrasov, and of various protest actions in Moscow. This is how poet Dmitrii Usov taught me to fight the all-devouring time flow.”

Neshumova lives a double life: her own life in the present and the lives of the poets from the past who have now “disappeared” but whose names she has revived. “It so happens that my work during the last decades has dealt with the reconstruction of biographies and literary events. This involves collecting, commenting and publishing complete works and personal archives of the authors whose names were erased from history. Studying their lives, putting together the loose puzzles of their biographies, I am compiling books--and I do so in a manner that allows for their

personal experience to become available to the reader. I revive their histories so they are not washed away like sandcastles.”

Neshumova’s efforts bring to life the lost works of Silver Age writers like Varvara Malakhieva-Mirovich and Dmitrii Usov. In the last three years, she has published the complete works of these writers. She is currently working on the legacy of Evgenii Arkhipov, who was a memoirist, philologist, and a friend of Vsevolod Meyerhold and many other Silver Age poets and artists.

Ivan Akhmetev

Ivan Akhmetev was hired by one of the Moscow’s scientific research institutes soon after graduating from Moscow State University’s Department of Physics. But he left his position thereafter, and since 1976, this brilliant, erudite young scientist has worked odd jobs as a night guard, a stoker to a museum, and an on-call firefighter. Akhmetev’s unusual career change took place in order for him to pursue a different calling—since the 1970s he has been developing "his own style of writing poetry," a style that has nothing in common with either classical, official, or dissident poetry. Subsequently, this style became known as literary minimalism.

After his career change, Akhmetev became friends with Russian underground poets and political dissidents. On December 10, 1978, he participated in a public demonstration in the Pushkin Square. As a result, in the spring of 1979 authorities subjected him to involuntary and abusive psychiatric treatment, what Russians in the 1970s called “psikhologicheskaiia repressiia” [psychological repression].

Since 1981 Akhmetev has been close friends with famous poets of Lianozovo Group, including Vsevolod Nekrasov, whose writings he has collected and compiled into an edition of his complete works. Akhmetev has also published the complete works of many other poets from the Lianozovo Group, as well as by Sokovnin, Makovskii, Vinogradova, Ulitin, Chertkov, Oboldueva, Chudakov.

Of his work, Ivan Akhmetev writes: “Freedom to publish for the past twenty-five years has created a more complete picture of the twentieth-century Russian poetry. The exceptional importance of the so-called Lianozovo Group of poets, including Evgenii Kropivnitskii (1893-1979), Igor Kholin (1920-1999), Genrikh Sapgir (1928-1999), Vsevolod Nekrasov (1934-2009) and Ian Satunovskii (1913-1982), is now fully recognized. I have prepared for publication the works of four of the five Lianozovo poets.”

In 2013, Akhmetev was nominated for the Andrei Bely Prize “for the outstanding services to the Russian literature.” The prize was granted to him “for his many years of work on the publications of uncensored twentieth-century Russian literary classics and the anthologies *Poetry of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century* and *Russian Poems, 1950-2000*.” He has been nominated for Joseph Brodsky Memorial Fellowship Fund. Akhmetev is the editor and compiler of *The Informal Poetry*, an online anthology he founded with G. Sapgir.